Exodus Chapter Twenty Three

Overview of Chapter 23

Exodus 23:1-9 contains laws with regards to legal justice. These verses answer the question as to how one loves his neighbor as himself since they deal with interpersonal relationships among members of the nation of Israel. These verses teach the Israelites that they were to be conscientiously honest and fair with each other. They were to completely avoid unkindness and injustice when dealing with each other. They were to be characterized as a people who had respect for one another. They teach the Israelites that failure to practice righteousness and justice with each other will result in discipline from the Lord.

Exodus 23:10-13 contains laws with regards to sabbaths. Verses 10-11 teach the Israelites that they were to let their land lie fallow every seventh year whereas verses 12-13 are reminded to observe the weekly sabbath in which they were to rest on the seventh day.

In Exodus 23:14-19, we have a discussion with regards to three annual festivals which the Israelites were to observe. They were to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the month of Abib (March-April) about the time of the barley harvest. They were also to observe the Feast of Harvest in the spring at the beginning of the wheat harvest when the firstfruits of the crops were to be given to the Lord. This feast is also called Pentecost since it occurred 50 days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Lastly they were to observe the Feast of Ingathering in early autumn (September-October). This feast is also called Tabernacles.

Then, we have epilogue of the chapter in Exodus 23:20-33. This pericope contains instructions to obey God during and after the conquest of Canaan. This section contains promises of cursing for disobedience and blessing for obedience. In this sense, it is very similar to those sections in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Verses 20-26 emphasize the need to obey God. Verses 27-30 serve as encouragement since they have God promising to drive the occupants of Canaan from the land. Then lastly, in verses 31-33, we have the Lord marking the borders of the Promised Land.

Exodus 23:1-9: Laws on Legal Justice

Exodus 23:1 “You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 2 You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute. 4 If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away,
you shall surely return it to him. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him. 6 You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute. 7 Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty. 8 You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. 9 You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (NASB95)

This pericope and specifically verses 1-2 elaborate upon the ninth commandment contained in Exodus 20:16, which prohibits the Israelites from bearing false witness against their fellow Israelite. Verses 1-2 prohibit the Israelites from getting involved in character assassination.

The Israelites are prohibited from bearing or spreading a false report about another Israelite. This means that they were not to spread gossip and hearsay. These verses emphasize the need to be absolutely honest in speaking about others. In every dispute they were to hear testimony from both sides before coming to a judgment. Even when appearances seem to confirm the charge, the Israelites were to wait until all the facts have been presented before making a decision. They were not to judge another based on one person’s testimony.

Spreading a false report about someone would be extremely damaging to their community and would be a failure to love one’s neighbor as oneself. It damages the community because it could influence what people thought about an individual so that they would relate differently to him than otherwise would have been the case. It also could be damaging in the sense that when it came time for a person to testify in a case against someone, their attitudes toward the person could be prejudiced by the rumors and gossip and hearsay, which are falsely called “common knowledge.”

A false report could serve as the basis for wrongfully arresting someone and bringing them to trial when they were actually innocent. False reports also would create factions in their community and clicks and divisiveness.

In verse 2, “the masses” would be better rendered “the majority.” The Israelites were not to get involved in following the majority in doing evil to a person by bearing a false report about them so as to pervert justice. They were not to be swayed by the majority in mistreating someone.

Douglas Stuart has the following comment, he writes “God has created human beings to be socially integrative and to try to cooperate with one another. As a result, it can be extremely difficult to take a stance in a difficult and emotionally charged situation or legal case against the majority (possibly including many of one’s friends or even family) in favor of a person or cause that has no other advocates. An example would be the temptation—in a court case against a person...
who already has a long record of improper behavior and whom virtually everyone would like to see punished—to join the majority in accusing that person of some sort of impropriety even when one has no actual direct knowledge the person is guilty. This law calls for individual believers, who in so many other cases are expected to conform to the group (as in worship or in keeping any apodictic law applicable to everyone at all times) to be willing to think and act as individuals clearly enough and righteously enough that they can stand against all others in their actions or testimony.”¹

So verse 2 addresses the effects of popular reaction to a charge of wrongdoing when it has been embraced by the majority as a fact. Unjustified malice or envy could make the defamation of the person’s character plausible for the majority to jump to the conclusion that they are guilty even before the case has been brought to court. The elders of the Israelites who would serve as judges were to conscientiously and scrupulously carry out their investigation with integrity.

Verse 3 is a prohibition with regards to showing partiality to a person in a case because they are poor. If the evidence and witnesses demonstrate their guilt, then they are to be judged guilty regardless if they are poor.

In verse 4, the Israelites are taught to love their neighbors by the instruction to return their enemies’ wandering donkey or ox to them and not let it wander away so that their enemy loses the animal. The word for “enemy” is the participle form of the Hebrew verb ʾā·yāḇ (אָיַב aw-yab’), which means “enemy” in the sense of someone who is openly hostile toward you.

The Lord is teaching the Israelites that they were not to be like the nations around them. The natural sinful inclination of people is not to help someone who is hostile toward them. However, the Lord wants the Israelites to treat their enemies the way they would want to be treated regardless of their enemy’s hostility toward them.

Verse 5 presents another instruction with regards to one’s enemies which if obeyed would manifest loving one’s neighbor as oneself. If the Israelites saw their enemy’s donkey fallen under its load, they were not to ignore the donkey but to help the donkey. It goes without saying that by practicing the Israelites practicing this command, their enemies might reconsider their attitude toward them.

In verse 6, we have another example as to how the Israelites were to love their neighbor, namely by not practicing justice with regards to the poor in their community. In contrast to verse 3, which prohibited the Israelites from showing partiality to the poor, here in verse 6, we have the flip side where the Israelites were prohibited from being unjust toward a person because they were poor. It would be easy and tempting to deny justice to the poor in lawsuits since they lack

the resources to insure justice for themselves. Also, the poor are less likely than the rich to have friends on a jury or to be on good terms with the judge on the case. Since the poor have so little influence in a society it would be easy to withhold justice from them.

In verse 7, the Israelites are told to keep far from a false charge, which means that they were prohibited from getting involved in any way with a complaint against someone in a court case that is not entirely true. This prohibition again is a call for honesty and integrity.

Commenting on this law Stuart writes “By extrapolation, a law such as this warns against giving credence to any sort of false charges in the society as a whole, including, but not limited to, organizations, businesses, and schools where individuals or committees are responsible to investigate charges against members, employees, or students.”

Also, in verse 7 the Lord prohibits the Israelites from killing an innocent person or the righteous since He will not acquit the guilty. This makes clear that those individuals who cause the death of an innocent person are guilty themselves by virtue of their unjust action. This prohibition emphasizes with the Israelites the need to be conscientious in their legal processes and not to rush to judgment so that a person is wrongfully executed whom the majority assumes is guilty but against whom there is no overwhelming evidence of guilt.

The Lord in verse 8 prohibits the Israelites from taking a bribe. The Israelites were not to take a bride because it blinds the clear sighted and subverts justice. A bribe causes the dismissal of cases that actually have merit. They were not to declare the guilty innocent or vice versa because of receiving a bribe. The power of the bribe is that it subverts justice and destroys personal integrity.

The Israelites are told by the Lord in verse 9 to not oppress strangers in their land because they themselves were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thus, the Lord is telling them to remember that they were mistreated in Egypt as strangers and were not to practice the same mistreatment of strangers in their land. This prohibition echoes the one taught in Exodus 22:21.

As was the case in Exodus 22:21, here in Exodus 23:9, the Lord is teaching the Israelites to not discriminate against foreigners or aliens because they too were aliens or strangers in Egypt for over four hundred years. A resident alien was a person who moved into an area where he had neither land nor clan ties and would be without traditional tribal legal support and protection and would be vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Thus, the Israelites were prohibited by God for taking advantage of resident aliens, which was common in the ancient world. Thus, God does not want the Israelites to engage in a practice of discriminating against aliens

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when they were themselves at one time aliens or foreigners residing in Egypt for over four hundred years.

*Exodus 23:10-13: Laws Concerning Sabbaths*

Exodus 23:10 “You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, 11 but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. 12 Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves. 13 Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth.” (NASB95)

In verses 10-11, the Lord commands the Israelites to sow their land for six years and gather in its yield. However, on the seventh year they were to let the land rest so that the poor of the land may eat of it. Whatever the poor leaves, their animals could eat. This was to be practiced with their vineyards and their olives groves. This sabbatical year reminded the Israelites that God owned the land and that they were merely stewards (cf. Leviticus 25:23). It is also taught in Leviticus 25:1-7.

Stuart writes “Here Israel learned that their farming practices must include a regular pattern of noncultivation. The purpose of such a practice every seventh year of letting the land lie fallow centered on the way such a routine helped the poor and wildlife. From an agri-science point of view, it also would allow the land some time for additional nitrogen fixing as natural grassing-over would occur on most of the surface of the uncultivated land, and this would be good for the land in the long run. The focus of the command, however, is ecological-humanitarian and not on improving productivity. This law reflects the “Sabbath” principle of the Gen 1 creation story (a cessation after six out of seven periods of time have been completed), as also reflected in the weekly Sabbath command of 20:11 and the six/seven-year contract period for servants in 21:2.”

Now, this sabbatical year command appears to have called for no crop farming every seven years throughout Israel, which would mean that everyone would take a year off farming. However, Exodus 23:10-11 and Leviticus 25:1-7 do not actually state whether their was to be a nationwide stoppage on all farms for all crops at the same time or a system of staggered seven-year cessations for individual crops in individual fields. Interestingly, the law on the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25:8-55 explicitly demands a nationwide observance at the same time by everyone in Israel.

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However, Leviticus 25:1-7 does not explicitly demand universal compliance throughout Israel, which suggests that farmers were given the freedom to decide how to rotate or stagger the resting of their crops among their various fields, groves and vineyards. Thus, farmers would be active every year whereas their fields, vineyards and groves would not be. Also, the same amount of food would be produced every year.

One of the reasons for the Babylonian captivity was that the Israelites failed to observe the sabbatical year. They were deported from the land for seventy years in order to give the land rest (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:20-21; Deuteronomy 15:1-3).

In Exodus 23:12, the Lord reminds the Israelites to observe the Sabbath meaning that they were to work six days of the week but rest on the seventh day. This verse echoes Exodus 20:8-11.

Genesis 2:2-3 teaches that God rested or ceased from His creative and restorative activity on the seventh day. The Hebrew words for “seventh” and “rested” are similar.

The observance of the Sabbath is an ordinance given to the nation of Israel and not the church. Although the church was not given the ordinance to observe the Sabbath, they are commanded to enter into God’s Sabbath rest meaning to rest in the promises of God and one’s union with Christ (cf. Hebrews 4). Though the Sabbath was not given to the church, the principle taught by it is applicable to the church, namely, that one is to set aside time to reflect upon who and what God is and what He has done on behalf of you. In other words, they are to set aside time for God and to devote oneself to Him exclusively. So whether one observes Saturday or Sunday or Monday, a believer should not work seven days a week but take at least one day to devote exclusively to God.

Now, Exodus 20:8-11 makes clear that the observance of the Sabbath is connected to the fact that God Himself rested on the seventh day after six days of work (Genesis 2:2-3). The Sabbath is thus an invitation to rejoice in God’s creation and to acknowledge that He is sovereign.

Deuteronomy 5:15 gives another reason for observing the Sabbath. This verse connects the Sabbath with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Therefore, every Sabbath the Israelites were to bring into remembrance that the Lord delivered them from Egyptian bondage by means of His omnipotence.

Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14-15 and Exodus 23:12 teach that the Sabbath was for the benefit of both man and animal in Israel. Exodus 31:13, 17, Ezekiel 20:12 and 20 teach that it was a sign of the covenant between the Lord and Israel. Thus, those in Israel who failed to keep the Sabbath were put to death (Exodus 31:14; Numbers 15:32-36; Jeremiah 17:19-27). The keeping of the Sabbath would affirm one’s loyalty to the Lord and would guarantee His presence and deliverance.
Exodus 23:13 echoes Exodus 20:3 and also expands upon it in the sense that it adds the prohibition against even mentioning any other gods but Yahweh. Both these verses emphasize that the Israelites are to be totally and completely loyal and devoted to Yahweh. He alone is to be worshipped.

Both these verses prohibit the Israelites from practicing idolatry and worshipping angels or men rather than God who is their Creator and Redeemer. It denotes the uniqueness of God in that He is the only being in creation who is to be worshipped by the Israelites. It expresses God’s claim upon the Israelites and demands their absolute loyalty and allegiance to Him.

*Exodus 23:14-19: Laws Concerning Annual Festivals*

Exodus 23:14 “Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. 15 You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. 16 Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. 17 Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. 18 You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning. 19 You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God. You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.” (NASB95)


Exodus 23:14 makes clear that no one was exempt from attending these three festivals. No excuses could be made. No one could claim that their job responsibilities kept them from attending. The emphasis of these three festivals was to worship the Lord. God set aside time for the Israelites to worship Him, giving them a break from their daily routines.

Now, in Exodus 23:15, the Israelites are told to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the month of Abib (March-April) about the time of the barley harvest. In verse 16, they were commanded to observe the Feast of Harvest in the spring at the beginning of the wheat harvest when the firstfruits of the crops were
to be given to the Lord. This feast is also called Pentecost since it occurred 50 days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Lastly, also in verse 16, they were commanded to observe the Feast of Ingathering in early autumn (September-October). This feast is also called Tabernacles.

The observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is first mentioned in Exodus 12:17. In Exodus 12:15-20, the Lord gives Moses and Aaron instructions with regards to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was to be a national celebration of Israel’s redemption from Egypt. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were closely connected and constituted a single unit. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be for seven days according to Exodus 12:15, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the month (Lev. 23:6; Num. 28:17). The removal of leaven from each home signifies the removal of evil. It speaks of sanctification.

Leaven was not to be found in the house. It is a substance such as yeast that is used to produce fermentation in dough. It produces a gas that lightens dough or batter. Leaven in the word of God speaks of evil (1 Cor. 5:6b-8; Gal. 5:9). Evil is anything that denies the grace of God such as legalism. The person with leaven in their house represented someone who adds works to salvation and therefore tramples on the Work of Christ and refuses the grace of God, which is God’s unmerited favor towards man. It is extended to us based upon His justice being satisfied at the cross by Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross.

The Israelites were to separate themselves from the evil standards of the rest of the heathen world in order to serve the Lord exclusively. Failure to do so would result in a loss of the covenant privileges and rights and also death.

Constable writes, “The Feast of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover meal and continued for seven more days (v. 15). The bread that the Jews used contained no leaven (yeast), which made it like a cracker rather than cake in its consistency. The Old Testament uses leaven as a symbol of sin often. Leaven gradually permeates dough, and it affects every part of the dough. Here it not only reminded the Israelites in later generations that their ancestors fled Egypt in haste, before their dough could rise. It also reminded them that their lives should resemble the unleavened bread as redeemed people. Bread is the staff of life and represents life. The life of the Israelites was to be separate from sin since they had received new life as a result of God's provision of the Passover lamb. Eating unleavened bread for a week and removing all leaven from their houses would have impressed the necessity of a holy life upon the Israelites.” (Ibid. page 66)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the day after the Passover, and continued for seven days (Lev. 23:6-8). It began immediately after sunset, which was the beginning of the fifteenth day of Nisan. Thus there was no interval between the Passover and this feast. The Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately followed the Passover and lasted seven days, from the fifteenth to the twentieth
Nisan (or Abib). On each of those days, after the morning sacrifice, a sacrifice in connection with the feast was presented; unleavened bread alone was eaten (Ex. 12:15-20; 13:6-7; Deut. 16:3-8).

The usual morning and evening sacrifices, with their grain and drink offerings. Two young bulls, one ram, seven lambs of the first year, with their grain and drink offerings. These were presented after the morning sacrifice (Num. 28:19-24). The first and seventh days of the feast were celebrated by a holy convocation and resting from work, with the exception of preparing food. On the intervening days work might be carried on unless the weekly Sabbath fell on one of them, in which case the full strictness of Sabbath-keeping was observed, and the special feast sacrifice was not presented until after the Sabbath offering.

On the second feast day (sixteenth Nisan) the first sheaf of the new harvest (barley) was symbolically offering to the Lord by waving—not burning on the altar—accompanied with a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, with its grain and drink offerings. Previous to this offering neither bread nor roasted grain of the new harvest was allowed to be eaten (Lev. 23:9-14). Those attending presented freewill, burnt, and holy offerings of sheep and oxen (Ex. 23:15, 19; Deut. 16:2), and sacrificial meals were eaten.

The feast closed on the twenty-first, with rest from work and a holy convocation. Scripture records that the Passover was kept on the evening before the Israelites left Egypt (Ex. 12:28), the second year after the Exodus (Num. 9:1-5), and then not again until they entered Canaan (Ex. 13:5; Josh. 5:10). Only three instances are recorded in which the Passover was celebrated between the entrance into the Promise Land and the Babylonian captivity, namely, under Solomon (2 Chron. 8:13), under Hezekiah when he restored the national worship (30:15), and under Josiah (2 Kings 23:21; 2 Chron. 35:1-19). But the inference that the Passover was celebrated only on those occasions seems less warranted, that in later times it was so punctually and universally observed.

After the return of the Jews from captivity the celebration of the Passover, like that of other institutions, became more regular and systematic; and its laws, rites, manners, and customs have been faithfully transmitted to us. These were the same as those in the time of Christ and His apostles, and therefore, of the utmost importance and interest to us in understanding the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Mark 14; Luke 22). The application of the Feast of Unleavened Bread for us here in the church age is that it portrays experiential sanctification (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 5:6-9).

Stuart answers the question as to why the Israelites were required by the Lord to eat unleavened bread as the special focus of the Passover meal, he writes, “The answer is that unleavened bread was the unique food of the original exodus, the event God wanted his people to be sure not to forget. People everywhere normally
eat leavened bread. It tastes better, is more pleasant to eat, is more filling. Leavened bread was the normal choice of the Israelites in Egypt too. But on the night they ran, there was no time for the usual niceties—a fast meal had to be eaten, and hastily made bread had to be consumed. The fact that a lamb or goat kid was roasted for the meat portion of the meal or that bitter herbs were eaten as a side dish was not nearly so special or unusual as the fact that the bread was unleavened, thus essentially forming sheets of cracker. Eating it at the memorial feast intentionally recalled the original departure in haste. Eating it for a solid week tended to fix the idea in one’s consciousness. But was cheating—eating ‘anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh’—really worthy of such punishment that the offender ‘must be cut off from Israel’? The answer once again relates to the way actions indicate faith. God had declared that the action of smearing blood on doorframes was the sign of faith he would accept in order to avoid death in a household; now he declared that eating the Passover with its special, nonyeasted bread was the sign of faith that indicated a person was keeping the Passover as a believer in its meaning and therefore a true member of the covenant community of Israel.”

In Exodus 12:16, the Lord stipulates that the Israelites were not to do any work on the first day and the last day of the Feast Unleavened. Instead they were to use these two days to worship the Lord together as a corporate unit. These two days were to be days of celebration and a time to bring into remembrance their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

In Exodus 12:17, the Lord says that like the Passover festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a permanent ordinance to be observed forever by the Israelites. Then, in Exodus 12:18-20, He reiterates with Moses and Aaron the instructions He gave them as recorded in Exodus 12:15. In these verses, the Lord repeats the instructions He gave in Exodus 12:15 and 16 in order to emphasize the importance of the Israelites observing this Feast of Unleavened Bread annually as a permanent ordinance.

Exodus 13:6-7 echo Exodus 12:14-20. The former reiterates the latter and in fact condenses it. In Exodus 13:8, Moses teaches the Israelites that when they observed the feast of unleavened bread they were to communicate to their sons what the Lord did for them. In Exodus 13:9, he teaches that the observance of this feast was to continually remind the Israelites of the Lord delivering them from slavery in Egypt. In Exodus 13:10, he says that this great deliverance was to be observed by them annually in the ceremony of the seven-day festival of unleavened bread.

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The Feast of Harvest or Weeks or Pentecost was the second national festival in Israel and took place fifty days after the Passover Sabbath (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:25-21; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12). It was designated the Feast of Weeks which celebrated the wheat harvest in Israel and was a one day feast of celebration. It was originally the festival of the first fruits of the grain harvest (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:17-22; Num. 28:26-31). It was called the Feast of Weeks because it came after a period of seven weeks of harvesting that began with the offering of the first barley sheaf during the Passover celebration and ended with the wheat harvest.

Pentecost took place fifty days after the Feasts of First fruits, which spoke of our Lord’s resurrection. It was celebrated in Israel as the anniversary of the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai in 1441 B.C., which was the beginning of the dispensation of the Law. The dispensation of grace began on the day of Pentecost with the baptism of the Spirit. So God is setting a contrast between the Law and Grace.

Fifty days after the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost was observed. This was literally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem in June of 33 A.D. The church age began on the day of Pentecost. The space between the feast of Passover and the day of Pentecost was 50 days. Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13). It was called this because it was celebrated 7 complete weeks, or 50 days, after the Passover (Lev. 23:15-16). It was also called the Feast of the Harvest (Ex. 23:16) because it concluded the harvest of the latter grains. Pentecost was also known as the day of the first fruits (Num. 28:26) because the 1st loaves made from the new grain were then offered on the altar (Lev. 23:17).

Pentecost began with the offering of the First-Fruits of the Barley Harvest and ended with the ingathering of the Wheat Harvest. The first day of the Feast of the First-Fruits, the Last Day was the Feast of Pentecost. Only the 1st and last day were celebrated. At the Feast of Pentecost new Meat offering was to be offered before the Lord, which depicts the Church as something new, a mystery. It was called new because it must be of grain from the new harvest. This also speaks of the Church.

At the Feast of First-Fruits stalks of grain were to be offered and waved, but at the Feast of Pentecost the grain was to ground and made into flour, from which two loaves were to be baked with leaven.

The Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles typifies the millennial reign of Christ. The Feast of Tabernacles is also called in the Scriptures the festival of Tents (Hebrew: θήκη τομάδων, “Feast of Booths,” 2 Chron. 8:13; Ezra 3:4; Zech. 14:16, 18-19; Greek: skenopegia, John 7:2, “Feast of Booths”) was so called because the Israelites were commanded to live in booths during its continuance (Lev. 23:43). It was also called the feast of Ingathering (Hebrew: θήκη τομάδων, Ex. 23:16, “Feast
of the Harvest”; 34:22), because it was held after the ingathering of the harvest and fruits.

The Feast of Tabernacles was also called the festival of Jehovah (Hebrew: hag YHWH, Lev. 23:39, “feast of the Lord”) or simply the festival (1 Kings 8:2; 2 Chron. 5:3, “the feast”), because it was the most important or well known.


The Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration to be observed at the end of the harvest and was continued seven days (Deut. 16:13). The people during the feast were to dwell in booths made of the branches of palm trees and willows from the brook, which would remind them of the palm trees of Elim, and the Willows of Babylon (Ps. 137:1-9).

What the Sabbath is to the week, a day of rest; so the seventh month to the other six months of the seventh month cycle, typifies a period of rest-the Sabbath rest of the millennial dispensation in relation to the other six thousand years of the world’s work day history.

Like the Lord’s Supper is to us here in the church age, a memorial looking back to the Person and Work of Christ on the cross and forward to the Second Advent so the feast of tabernacles will be a memorial to Israel looking back to Egypt and forward to the millennium.

While the Feast of Tabernacles began on the Sabbath and continued seven days, it was to be followed by a Sabbath (Lev. 23:39). This Sabbath on the eighth day points to the eternal state that follows the millennium and the termination of human history when the Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth.

In Exodus 23:17 the Lord teaches the Israelites that all their males should appear three times a year in order to worship at these three feasts. They were to worship with grain and animal offerings. An offering was to be without yeast on the altar when it was consumed.

Exodus 23:18 prohibits the Israelites from offering the blood of the animal sacrifice with unleavened bread, nor were the fat of the animal to remain overnight until morning. This prohibition is related to pagan rituals, which God would not allow the Israelites to practice. God did not want the Israelites duplicating the pagan sacrifices. In the ancient world people knew that when the blood was drained from the animal that the animal would die. They thus concluded and they were right that the life of an animal is in its blood. Consequently, these ancient people would drink the blood of the animal in an attempt to prolong or strengthen their lives. The Lord who gives and prolongs life forbid the Israelites from engaging in such practices (cf. Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; Deuteronomy 15:23).
The following prohibition in Exodus 23:18 prevented the Israelites from letting the fat of the animal remain overnight until morning. Leviticus 3:16-17 presents a more comprehensive statement with regards to the Lord’s teaching here in Exodus 23:18. This prohibition is directly related to worshipping God in the manner in which He prescribes. All the fat of the animal was to be the Lord’s portion forever. The fat portions of the animal were separated from the meat with muscle and were to be presented as burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar. If a person tried to keep them for any other purpose than for the Lord, then they were failing to worship Him in a manner prescribed by Him. Keeping the fat until morning would be withholding from the Lord that which is His and would be making God wait for His portion, which is disrespectful.

Exodus 23:19 teaches them to bring firstfruits of their crops and give them to the Lord. This command teaches the Israelites to give the Lord their best from their crops, which would honor Him. This command prevented the Israelites from cheating God. God deserved the best of their crops because He is responsible for giving them their crops and their productivity.

The prohibition in Exodus 23:19 to not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk occurs three times in the Pentateuch (Exodus 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). This prohibition is also directly related to pagan rituals. In the Canaanite fertility religion, they believed that cooking a young goat in its mother’s milk would magically stimulate the power of nature to procreate, thus producing a stronger flock or would somehow make the flock more fertile. To engage in this practice would be dangerous for the Israelites because it could lead them to conclude that the productivity of their flocks was not directly tied to the blessing of the Lord but rather was tied to these magical practices of this fertility religion. Thus, this prohibition is designed to protect the Israelites from engaging in such pagan practices which would direct thanksgiving away from God and toward the gods of the Canaanite religion. This prohibition in Exodus 23:19 is used by Rabbis to forbid mixing dairy with meat. The Orthodox Jews keep dairy and meat separate.

Hannah writes “The prohibition against cooking a young goat in its mother’s milk (23:19; cf. 34:26; Deut. 14:21) may have been because of religious practices in which the Canaanites cooked goats in their mother’s milk in a fertility rite. God did not want His people to partake of anything related to idolatrous worship. Or the prohibition may have been against the inhumane treatment of young goats. In the Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16b) the Israelites may have been tempted to follow the common bedouin practice of cooking the meat of young goats in goat’s milk, whereas the young goats should have been left with their mothers. In other words, perhaps the prohibition meant that the Israelites were not to take what was intended
to promote life (goat milk) and use it to destroy life. This stipulation may be the basis for the present Jewish custom of not mixing milk products with meat.”

Constable commenting on verse 19 writes “The commentators have accounted for the prohibition against boiling a kid (young lamb) in its mother's milk in many different ways. Some scholars believe it was the opposition to commingling life and death, a source of life and its product, or Israel and the nations, that was the basis for this prohibition (cf. Lev. 22:27-28; Deut. 22:6). Another view is that it was a way of specifying that only weaned animals were acceptable as sacrifices (cf. 34:18-26). The most popular explanation is that this was a pagan practice that showed disrespect for the God-given relationship between parent and offspring. The Ras Shamra tablets have shown that boiling sacrificial kids in their mother's milk was a common ritual practice among the Canaanites. This ordinance is the basis for the separation strict Jews make in their diet by not mixing dairy and meat products. Observant Jews even provide separate equipment and kitchens for the preparation of these dishes.” (Notes on Exodus, 2003 Edition, Dr. Thomas Constable; pages 121-122; Published by Sonic Light; www.soniclight.com/)

Exodus 23:20-23: Promise of the Angel of the Lord

Exodus 23:20 “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. 21 Be 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. 22 But 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. 23 For 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.” (NASB95)

Verse 20 contains a promise to the Israelites from God that He will send His angel before them to guard them along the way and bring them to the place which He has prepared for them, which is the land of Canaan. So God is promising protection and guidance for the Israelites.

Now, the question arises as to who the angel is? Is it Michael, the arch angel since Daniel 12:1 says that he stands watch over the nation of Israel? Or is it the preincarnate Christ?

“Angel” is the noun māl·ʾāḵ (מַלְאָךְ) (mal-awk), which means, “messenger” and is used in the Old Testament with reference to “elect” angels (Gen. 19:1; Ps. 91:11)

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and men (Deut. 2:26; Josh. 6:17) and of the “preincarnate” Christ (Gen. 22:11; Zech. 3:1).

God’s statement in verse 21 makes clear that it is the preincarnate Christ and not Michael or any other elect angel. Notice God says to the Israelites that the Israelites are to obey this angel and not be rebellious towards Him since He will not pardon their transgression. This clearly implies that this angel has the ability to forgive sin, which is God’s prerogative alone. Also, God says that He will not pardon the transgression of the Israelites because His name is in this angel. Nowhere in Scripture is this said to be the case of any angel but only Jesus Christ.

“The name” is the noun šēm (שֵׁם) (shame), which has a four-fold sense: (1) It signifies the “personality” of God distinguishing Him from the heathen gods. (2) It signifies the “character” of God representing who He is. (3) It signifies God’s “work” in creation and for the salvation of men. (4) It signifies the “reputation” of God before men.

Furthermore, notice that God makes clear that the angel and Yahweh are one and the same since Yahweh says that to obey the angel’s voice is to do all that He says. In other words, obedience to the angel is synonymous or equivalent to obeying Yahweh.

Therefore, here in Exodus 23:1-2, we have the promise that the preincarnate Christ will guide the Israelites to the Promised Land and protect them. The word “incarnate” is from the Latin, in and caro, whose stem carn means, “flesh.” Therefore, the term “preincarnate” means before the Son of God became a human being permanently in Bethlehem.

There are three stages in the career of the Lord Jesus Christ: (1) “Preincarnate”: Eternity past as the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God. (2) “Incarnate”: Virgin birth through the First Advent to the resurrection. (3) “Glorified Incarnate”: Resurrection and on into eternity future.

Therefore, since the angel being sent is a reference to the preincarnate Christ, the Father is the one who is making this promise to the Israelites.

In verse 22, the Father instructs the Israelites that obedience to the preincarnate Christ, the angel of the Lord will result in success but disobedience will result in failure for them. The Father promises that if they obey Him, then He will be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to those who are their adversaries. This verse is thus teaching the Israelites that their obedience to God’s Word will appropriate the omnipotence of God, which will result in the Israelites being victorious over their enemies and adversaries.

“The land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites” is a reference of course to the promise of land that is found in the Abrahamic covenant and is sometimes called by theologians the “Palestinian covenant.” In other words, the “Palestinian” covenant is in fact an
extension of the “Abrahamic” covenant, which is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. This promise of land echoes the promise of land in Exodus 3:8, 6:4 and 13:5.

Like the “Abrahamic” covenant, the “Palestinian” covenant that the Lord established with Abram denoted the Lord’s gracious undertaking for the benefit of Abram and his descendants. Like the “Abrahamic” covenant, the “Palestinian” covenant was “unconditional” meaning that its fulfillment was totally and completely dependent upon the Lord’s faithfulness.

Genesis 13:14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward 15 for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. 16 I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.” (NASB95)

The Lord’s promise of land to Abram and his descendants in Genesis 13:14-17 is an “extension” upon His promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1 and is thus related to the “Abrahamic” covenant. The “Palestinian” covenant was a confirmation and enlargement of the original “Abrahamic” covenant and amplified the land features of the “Abrahamic” covenant (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:18).

The “Palestinian” covenant was confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4) and Jacob (Gen. 35:12), reiterated to Moses (Ex. 6:2-8) who described the geographical boundaries of the land in Numbers 34:1-12 and who prophesied the fulfillment of this covenant during the millennium in Deuteronomy 30:1-9.

The land grant under the “Palestinian” covenant: (1) Most of the land in Turkey (2) Most of East Africa (3) Saudi Arabia (4) Yemen (5) Oman and Red Sea (6) Syria (7) Iraq (8) Jordan.

The land grant has boundaries on the Mediterranean, on Aegean Sea, on Euphrates River and the Nile River.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 describes seven features of the “Palestinian” covenant: (1) The nation will be plucked off the land for its unfaithfulness (Deut. 28:63-68; 30:1-3). (2) There will be a future repentance of Israel (Deut. 28:63-68; 30:1-3). (3) Israel’s Messiah will return (Deut. 30:3-6). (4) Israel will be restored to the land (Deut. 30:5). (5) Israel will be converted as a nation (Deut. 30:4-8; cf. Rm. 11:26-27). (6) Israel’s enemies will be judged (Deut. 30:7). (7) The nation will then receive her full blessing (Deut. 30:9).

The Lord promises that this land would be given to Abram’s descendants and this promise was fulfilled to a certain extent by Israel under Joshua (Josh. 21:43-45; cf. 13:1-7) and David and Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:20-25; Neh. 9:8).
The prophets of Israel prophesied of the “Palestinian” covenant’s literal and ultimate fulfillment during the millennial reign of Christ (Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 16:14-16; 23:3-8; 31:8, 31-37; Ezek. 11:17-21; 20:33-38; 34:11-16; 39:25-29; Hos. 1:10-11; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 8:4-8).

During the millennial reign of Christ, the northern boundary of Israel will extend from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River (47:15-17), incorporating much of modern Lebanon and Syria. The eastern border will extend south from the Euphrates River, incorporating the Golan Heights and portions of Syria almost up to Damascus, and continue south to where the Jordan River leaves the Sea of Galilee. The river will be the eastern border to the Dead Sea’s southern end (47:18). From there the southern border will go westward, incorporating the Negev and parts of Sinai all the way along the Brook of Egypt (the modern Wadi-el-Arish) to the point where it reaches the Mediterranean Sea (47:19), the western border (47:20). Although the land will have twelve tribal divisions, these subdivisions will differ from those in the Book of Joshua.


In Exodus 23:23, the “Amorite” means literally “the Westerner,” and thus the name Amorites is generally supposed to mean “western highlanders” (cf. Num 13:29; Deut 1:7-20; Josh 10:6), or “tall ones” (cf. Amos 2:9; see also Num 13:33; Deut 2:10). The Amorites were so prominent that their name seems sometimes to be used for Canaanites in general (e.g., Josh 24:8). In Abraham's day the Amorites lived west of the Dead Sea, in Hazazon-tamar (Gen 14:7), “that is Engedi” (2 Chron 20:2) and about Hebron (Gen 14:13, cf. 13:18).

The “Hittites” were present in the land of Canaan during the time of Abraham according to Genesis 15:19-21 and they reached the zenith of their power sometime later and still possessed great power at the time of Solomon a thousand years later according to 2 Chronicles 1:17.

The “Perizzites” refers to a tribe of people who inhabited the mountainous region eventually taken over by the tribes of Ephraim and Judah (cf. Josh. 11:3; 17:5; Judg. 1:4f.) and because they were related to the Canaanites, the term “Perizzites” often refers to this entire group (cf. Gen. 13:7; 34:30).

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The term “Canaanite” denotes those individuals descended from Canaan who lived in the land west of the Jordan River before the conquest of Joshua and whose western border was the Mediterranean Sea, especially in the lower and coastal regions (Gen. 13:12; Num. 33:51). The northern border of the land of the Canaanites went as far as Sidon, which is 120 miles north of Jerusalem and the southern border extended to Gerar, which is about 11 miles south-southeast of Gaza, which was on the coast 50 miles southeast of Jerusalem. The Canaanites who lived in the highland regions were often called “Amorite.”

At times the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, were called “Canaanites” but strictly speaking the nations who dwelt on the coasts or river lowlands were called “Canaanite” (Nm. 13:29).

The Canaanites were descendants of Noah’s son Ham. They were actually composed of seven nations (Deut. 7:1) and were idolatrous (Deut. 29:17), involved in the occult (Deut. 18:9-10) and gross immorality (Lev. 18), which archaeology confirms. They were under a divine curse (Genesis 9:24-27).

Discoveries at the ancient Ugarit, north of Tyre and Sidon, have revealed Canaanite religion promoted child sacrifice, idolatry, prostitution in the name of religion and all kinds of occultic and immoral practices. Therefore, it was an act of justice in the Lord dispossessing the Amorites, also known as the Canaanite.

The Lord does not dispossess and judge a nation immediately until He has given it grace in the sense of giving it a sufficient amount of time to repent. Once a nation has completely rejected God’s grace and every opportunity to repent and accept Christ as Savior, it will become totally and completely saturated with evil (see Lev. 18:24-28; 20:23) and then the Lord sends judgment.

The Lord used the nation of Israel under Joshua to pour out His judgment upon the Canaanites for their immoral degeneracy (Gen. 15:16; 19:5; Lev. 18; 20; Deut. 12:31). The Canaanites were defeated on the battlefield, destroyed, or integrated with other nations or enslaved to Israel (Gen. 14:1-16; 15:18-21; Ex. 3:7-10; Deut. 1-3; Josh. 10-19). Therefore, Genesis 9:24-29 sets the stage or lays the foundation for Israel’s foreign policy in the land (Deut. 20:16-18).

“Canaan” is the more ancient name of Palestine, apparently derived from Hurrian, meaning, “belonging to the land of red purple,” the dye the early Canaanites or Phoenician traders peddled far and wide. It was obtained from the murex shells found on the Mediterranean (Phoenician) coast” (Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament, page 54, AMG Publishers).

The land of Canaan was west of the Jordan River before the conquest by Joshua, which had the Mediterranean Sea as its eastern border and whose position served as the route of two major highways between Egypt and the Western coast of the Arabian Peninsula to Mesopotamia and Asia Minor (with connections to India and Europe respectively).
The natural boundaries of Canaan as expressed in the Bible extend from the Negev in the South to the northern reaches of the Lebanon Range in Syria and the land west of the range and of the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea.

In Genesis 10:19, Moses defines the borders of the Canaanites because it is this land that the Lord will dispossess for Israel and fulfill the prophecy of Noah in Genesis 9:24-25 regarding Canaan. The northern border of the land of the Canaanites went as far as Sidon, which is 120 miles north of Jerusalem and the southern border extended to Gerar, which is about 11 miles south-southeast of Gaza, which was on the coast 50 miles southeast of Jerusalem.

The “Hivites” settled in the land of Canaan and was displaced by Israel under Joshua (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; Deut. 7:1; Josh. 9:1).

Genesis 34:2 records that they were in the land of Shechem and according to Genesis 36:2, Esau took a Hivite for a wife and 1 Kings 9:20 records that Solomon used them as builders. Judges 3:3 records that they settled in the foothills of Lebanon.

The “Jebusite” settled in “Jebus,” which is the name of Jerusalem when this tribe held it (Josh. 15:63; Judg. 19:10) and it wasn’t until David’s reign that they were finally driven out (2 Sam. 5:6-7; cf. 1 Kings 9:20).

Exodus 23:24-30: Requirements and Promises Related to Worshipping the Lord

Exodus 23:24 “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. 25 But you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. 26 There 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. 28 I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. 29 I 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. 30 I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.” (NASB95)

In verse 24, the Father issues demands of the Israelites. First they were prohibited from worshipping the gods of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites. The second is that the Israelites were to destroy the places in which these people worship their gods. They were to utterly destroy any kind of monuments to these gods or symbols portraying these pagan gods. This command was essential because the Father knew that these pagan places of
worship would serve as a temptation in taking the Israelites away from worshipping Him.

The stone pillars were to be broken in pieces. These pillars are condemned throughout Old Testament (cf. Exodus 34:13; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3; 16:22; 1 Kings 14:23). They marked pagan shrines and locations of worship.

Then, in Exodus 23:25-26 the Father promises the Israelites that if they worship and serve Him exclusively, then He will prosper them with bread and water and will remove all sickness from them. He promises also that their women would not miscarry and none would go childless. Furthermore, they will live long and fulfilling lives if they were loyal to Him.

In Exodus 23:27-30, the Father continues to present a list of things that He will do for the Israelites if they worship and serve Him exclusively and refuse to worship the gods of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites. In these verses, He promises to give them military victory over these people. However, in verses 29-30, He would not do it in a single year in order that the land would not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for them. He would drive them out little by little.

The reason for this gradual overcoming of the heathen occupants of the Promised Land is that the Israelites were too small in number to cultivate the land and thus keep it from being desolate and wild animals overrunning the land. So this gradual process would enable the Israelites to “grow” into the land. However, the conquest of the land was not gradual but rather turned out to be partial because of the Israelites’ disobedience (Joshua 13:13; 23:13; Judges 1:27-36; 2:21-3:6). They did not fully take possession of the land until the time of King David.

Douglas Stuart writes “Four kinds of curses (predictions of disaster), known from the covenant curse collections in the covenant sanctions passages of Lev 26 and Deut 28–32, are mentioned here as God’s methods of subduing the Canaanites in order to make possible Israel’s conquest of the promised land. They are terror/fear, confusion/helplessness, defeat in battle, and attack by wild animals/insects. The principle we have noted before applies here as well: whenever a few of the dozens of types of covenant curses are mentioned, the reader is expected to understand them as samples of the full range of curses that will actually be unleashed. We should therefore not take these four types of curses as the only or even as the primary sorts of afflictions God used to cow the Canaanites into submission, nor should we be surprised if no specific mention is made of them in the book of Joshua, where the actual conquest accounts are provided. Mentioning these four is a way of saying, ‘I will use whatever it takes to cause the Canaanites to be unable to resist your conquest of their land.’ Somewhat similarly, only three of the usual six or seven nations native to the land of Canaan are
mentioned in v. 28, in contrast to the six listed in v. 23. Again this is typical of the sort of synecdoche commonly seen throughout the Old Testament.”

*Exodus 23:31-33: Promises and Warnings Related to the Occupation of Promised Land*

**Exodus 23:31** “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. 32 You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. 33 They 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.” (NASB95)

In verse 31, we have God fixing the boundaries of the Promised Land or in other words, its borders. The Red Sea in this verse is the part of the Red Sea, which is now known as the Sea of Aqaba, which would form the southeastern boundary of the nation of Israel. The sea of the Philistines would be the western boundary, which is a reference to the Mediterranean Sea. The wilderness or desert was the Negev of Judah, which would serve as the southern boundary as well. The Euphrates River would be the northeastern boundary. These boundaries were occupied during the time of King Solomon (1 Kings 4:21) even though much of it was not fully under Israelite occupation.

In Genesis 15:18, God promises Abram the land “from the river of Egypt to the great River, the Euphrates,” thus from the southwest to the northeast, including by implication everything in between and the borders intended by the other compass points as well.

In Deuteronomy 11:24, the Lord promises the land “from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the western sea.” These (and others also found in the OT) are all somewhat imprecise generalizations akin to “from Maine to California” or “from Canada to Mexico” as ways of describing the United States. The record of the actual boundaries for Israel is found in Joshua 11-20.

Exodus 23:31 presents what God was willing to do for Israel and Exodus 23:32-33 tells the Israelites what they must do in order for God to fulfill His promise of land and the various blessings described earlier in the chapter. The Israelites are warned again by God that they must be totally and completely devoted to Him, worshiping and obeying Him exclusively. They were to totally reject the gods of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites in order for them to secure the promised blessings.

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Therefore, we can see that the Israelites were to exterminate these people and their religion. They could not eliminate one and keep the other. Both must be destroyed. Of course, sadly, Israel failed.