

In the background reading for this lesson (chapters 21-22, 23:1-9) the LORD gives additional essential laws that Israel must obey as their part of the covenant that the LORD would be establishing with them. The focus verses cover other terms of the covenant, with the actual ratification of the covenant by a sacrifice being described in Ex. 24:3-8. The covenant became official with the sprinkling of the blood from the sacrifices that were offered to establish the covenant (Heb. 9:18-22).

Chapters 21 and 22 describe various laws concerning such topics as the treatment of slaves, justice for someone killed by human hand or an animal, physical conflict between people, restitution for loss of property (whether by natural causes or foul play), and dealing with the poor, orphans, widows, and foreigners. These laws describe how to resolve differences between people and how restitution should be made by the guilty/responsible party.

Exodus 23:1-9 lists various laws forbidding the giving of false testimony or impeding justice for the poor or foreigners. Also listed are laws such as forbidding the acceptance of bribes and a law dictating that you take livestock back home to its owner if you find it wandering around away from the owner's property.

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### Exodus 23

10 And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: 11 But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, *and* with thy oliveyard.

The LORD introduces the concept of a sabbath for the land. The Israelites will be allowed to work the land and enjoy its produce for six consecutive years, but they are to let the land rest during the seventh year. This seventh year allows the land to recuperate and replenish the nutrients in the soil. It also benefited the poor and wildlife, who were allowed to eat from the land whatever grew during the seventh year. They were to not only apply this practice to the fields where they grew wheat or planted gardens, but also to their vineyards and oliveyards where they grew grapes and olives.

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12 Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.

This verse repeats the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), reminding Israel that each sabbath meant a day of rest, not just for them but also for their servants, work animals, and any foreigners who might be living among them.

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13 And in all *things* that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

**“And in all *things* that I have said unto you be circumspect [watch; observe; be on guard]”** – They should pay attention to the things that the LORD has said to them and be careful to obey them, particularly the commands concerning the sabbath.

**“and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth”** – The LORD doesn't want the names of other gods to cross the lips of the Israelites during the sabbath. They are not to call on them or show them any kind of honor or reverence because the sabbath is intended for honoring the LORD.

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14 Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. 15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:)

**“Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year”** – The LORD identifies three feasts that Israel should hold during the year to celebrate and remember the blessings of the LORD.

**“Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread...”** – The first feast is the feast of unleavened bread, which is a week of feasting during which they were not allowed to eat any leavened bread. The week begins on passover and celebrates the time that the LORD brought them out of Egypt.

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16 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, *which is* in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.

**“And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field”** – The second feast is the feast of harvest (also called the “feast of firstfruits”) and occurred 50 days (seven weeks) after the passover. Its purpose is to thank the LORD for the first fruits of the harvest that He provided for them that year. This feast is also called the feast of Pentecost and is the same day of the year that is described as “the day of Pentecost” in Acts 2:1.

**“and the feast of ingathering, *which is* in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field”** – The feast of ingathering occurred at the end of the harvest season and was a feast of thanksgiving to the LORD for the harvest. Because this feast was signaled by the sounding of trumpets, it was sometimes referred to as the feast of trumpets. It is also referred to as the feast of tabernacles (or booths), to commemorate the time in the wilderness when the Israelites lived in tabernacles (tents).

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17 Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

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All males in Israel were required to attend these feasts “before the Lord God” (at the tabernacle/temple). These men would have to trust that the LORD would protect their property while they were away at the feasts (**Ex. 34:23-24** “*Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year*”).

**Verses 18-33:** The LORD promises that if the people will obey Him and not worship the gods of the Canaanites, then He will bless and prosper them. He will protect them from their enemies, give them good health and prosperity with their fields and livestock. He also explains that when He drives out the heathen when He takes them to possess the land of Canaan, He will not drive them out all at once because then the land would then turn back to wilderness as the plant and wild life take back over before they could take possession of it. Instead He will gradually drive the heathen nations out so that Israel can occupy the newly vacant land as they are able.

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#### Exodus 24

3 And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.

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The LORD sends Moses back down the mountain with instructions to bring Aaron and his sons, Nadab and Abihu, along with seventy of the elders of Israel. They will worship the LORD from a distance because only Moses would be allowed to come face to face with the LORD. When Moses delivers the message and the terms of the covenant with the LORD to the people, they collectively declare that they will obey whatever the LORD commands them to do.

**Verses 4-6:** Moses begins making the covenant official by writing all the words the LORD has said into a book and then early the next morning he builds an altar with twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. He has young men offer oxen on the altar as burnt sacrifices. He saves the blood from the oxen, sprinkling half of it on the altar to signify the LORD’s agreement to enter the covenant.

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7 And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.

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Moses reads the book that he wrote with the words of the LORD (“the covenant”) before the people to remind them of terms of the covenant they are about to enter into. They again express their agreement with the terms of the covenant and their promise to be obedient. Moses then sprinkles the remainder of the blood on the people, signifying their agreement to enter the covenant (v. 8).

**Verses 9-18:** Moses takes Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel up the mountain to meet the LORD, where they see the LORD, apparently from a distance (v. 1). They have a feast with the LORD, after which Moses is called to ascend further up the mountain to be closer to the LORD. Moses will be given stone tablets on which the LORD has written the law so that he may teach the people the law of God. Moses obeys and ascends into the cloud of the LORD’s presence and remains there for forty days and nights.