



# 2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: March 16<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>

Sermon: March 15<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus



March 16

### **Exodus 23:3**

I want to attempt to run through some of the other verses that comprise chapter 23 during this week's devotions. We decided to camp out in one particular verse on Sunday morning which means there is quite a bit of meat left on the proverbial bone as it relates to this chapter and all that the Lord might desire to teach us through its precepts. Consequently, these devotions might seem a bit "disjointed" in their subject matter! Nevertheless, the goal of covering more of the chapter seems worthy to me and, I hope, it is profitable for you.

Today, I want us to consider a simple verse with profound implications for current cultural mood. Verse 3 says, "nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit." Obviously, verse 3 begins midway through a larger thought. The overarching subject matter of the first portion of chapter 23 has to do with just practices in the courtroom. Verses 1 and 2 prohibit men from bearing false witness which leads to the sentiment expressed for us in verse 3.

Stated succinctly, the Bible is clear that we ought not favor any individual over the truth! This might seem obvious enough but, in our world today, the biblical teaching on kindness and justice tends to be skewed in one direction, namely in the direction of the poor. To be clear, there are numerous exhortations to be kind and charitable and servant minded toward the poor. God is certainly concerned with our level of love towards the "least of these" but His directives to care for those who are disenfranchised does not override His holiness.

This is a key distinction that we must remember... God will never violate His righteous character and, therefore, we will never be commanded to disregard one truth in the interest of another. Unfortunately, in our world today, there are many "Christian" voices who would have us believe that we should check all our sense of truth at the door in order to "love" others.

Frankly, I'm not sure that this issue is all that "thorny" but I do want to make sure that we end the devotion with a very simple thought that might help some of you think through this issue with some peace. You see, the exhortation here is not to disfavor the poor, the exhortation here is to favor the truth! We can rest in knowing that the truth is always what we should pursue and this is true regardless of the economic status of those involved. The rich absolutely take advantage of the poor at times but the poor also know how to finagle the system for their own benefit! Our job is not to litigate based on status; our job is to do the best we can to uphold the biblical absolutes of truth and justice.

March 17  
**Exodus 23:7**

We are going to continue our discussion of Old Covenant Jurisprudence today by examining a commandment that I believe has profound implications for our culture today. Verse 7 says, “Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.” The term “innocent” does not mean totally spotless in this verse. The point here is to label a group of people who were not guilty of the charge that was levied towards them or; to state this a bit more clearly, they were undeserving of the punishment they received.

There is a biblical category for the “innocent”. This category is not absolute. Obviously, every individual who has ever lived (save Christ) was conceived in iniquity. All of us are guilty of sin, every single one of us was born with a sin nature and, therefore, we are rightly accountable before God for our misdeeds. However, there is a difference between a general guilt for sin and guilt for a specific crime. We can be guilty before God of sin and still be “innocent” of the charge that is made towards us!

The point today is that God hates it when innocent people suffer harm. There is a very clear principle at play here that we should protect those who are not deserving of a consequence. This is true as it relates to adults but, I would argue, it is even more true as it relates to children.

When I read this text, I couldn't help but think about the way this passage should inform our views of abortion. Unfortunately, in this country, we have made abortion an issue where the wrong people are convicted of the crime! We have made sex absolute, refused to hold people accountable for their fornication (whether that be a rapist or adulterer) and, consequently, we have seen fit to pronounce a death sentence on the innocent in their stead.

There is no more vulnerable and unprotected class of individuals on the planet than the unborn and yet, statistically speaking, there is no more endangered group of people in our society than those who have yet to leave the womb. When we read of the clear injunction against the harming or mistreatment of the innocent, we should be reminded that our country has blood on its hands in this regard. There is grace for those who have made such a decision, but that grace comes through the shed blood of Christ. Make no mistake, unless there is repentance and faith, the warning of verse 7 stands, “I (God) will not acquit the wicked.”

March 18

**Exodus 23:11**

There is a grave difference between justice and unkindness. I pray the distinction is clear to us all, but just in case, I wanted to make sure to give a wholistic view of the teaching of Exodus 23. If you recall, we spent a decent amount of time a few days ago speaking about the necessity of impartiality in the court of law. The point was made that the Bible implores believers not to favor the poor over others in hearing their case. This means that truth is not concerned with socio-economic standards, instead the goal of court proceedings is to rule in favor of the law in all circumstances.

That being the case, some might wrongly conclude that the Bible is teaching a lack of concern for the disenfranchised. If that reaction is close to home for you, I would draw your attention to the teaching of verse 11 which clearly commands God's people to be concerned with the poor.

The command is simple, cultivate and reap the fields for six years, but on the seventh year, let the fields rest and allow the poor and the rest of creation to enjoy whatever harvest springs from otherwise uncultivated soil. Why would the Lord place this command in the Bible? The only answer is that He is concerned with the well-being of all of His creation, including those who are less fortunate. There is a guiding principle here of charity and kindness that illuminates the very heart of God. God is a generous and benevolent Being and His desire is for His people to be aware of the needs of those around them.

How does this square with the earlier prohibition against favoring the poor in the courtroom? The answer must be that it is possible to be kind and helpful without being dishonest or unjust! It is necessary that we help people but that does not oblige us to be unjust to others.

If you think about our society today, so much of what passes for "kindness" and "charity" is really injustice parading about as philanthropy. When a person is forced to either deny reality (i.e. denying the obvious destructive behavior and addictions that led to a person's difficulties) OR when people are compelled to give that which is rightfully their possession under the guise of charity, the balance of chapter 23 is forfeited. The Lord did not want truth to be sacrificed for service, and He also did not desire a forced compliance that was not both volitional and outlined ahead of time. Instead, He gives clear instructions about His expectations and then leaves the responsibility in the hands of those who have the fields to carry out the plan. This preserves the dignity of both the wealthy and the poor.

March 19

### Exodus 23:24

Today's passage serves as a great reminder that we are not to trifle with the things that God forbids as sinful. You'll recall that the 10 Commandments include a prohibition against idolatry (2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment). This particular commandment is straightforward enough, but it was constantly violated by Israel throughout the years. G.K. Beale's book entitled "We Become What We Worship" does a marvelous job of chronicling the chronic offenses that became characteristic of Israel while showing the reader the disastrous impacts of idolatry on the people.

Today's verse is really a reprisal of the commandment with an added admonition to be as far removed from idols as possible. You'll notice here that God commands His people to "utterly overthrow them (the false gods of Israel's enemies) and break their pillars in pieces." There is little ambiguity to this admonition! Instead, God's desire for their wholistic obedience and fidelity to Him alone shines through in this passage.

Now, some might read this and think it sounds a bit severe. After all, couldn't they simply have disposed of the gods? Or, some might argue in our pluralistic society, wouldn't it have been more loving to simply disallow public worship of the gods? It seems drastic to "utterly overthrow" false gods. Why would the Lord require such a decisive act? The answer, of course, is that sin is not to be trifled with!

When you and I tolerate things in our homes and in our presence that are clearly and objectively sinful, we are allowing that which we cannot control. Furthermore, we are accepting behaviors that will ultimately destroy us! This is the story of Israel's history in a nutshell. Repeatedly they sought to play with the fire of clear sin and they always got burned!

I suppose my goal for today is rather simple, I hope that you can see the gravity of sin in the Lord's language and that His clarity on the topic will prompt you to action. I often wonder what Exodus 23 (or texts like it) might specifically say if they were written in our culture and moment. Would the Lord tell us not to bow down or serve the gods of modern entertainment? Would He admonish us to "utterly overthrow and break into pieces" our phones and television screens? I'm not sure! What I do know, however, is that we lose so much when we allow things into our homes and presence that are clearly and objectively wicked.

Some of you think you can manage. You fall into the same trap that Israel entered numerous times in the Old Testament. You are convinced that the dangers of sinful behavior are not all that prevalent and, therefore, you think you can manage the risk. Let the verbiage in passages like this one remind you that you are far less able to control evil than you think! The best practice is not to see how close you can get to carnality, the best practice is to do all you can to get rid of it altogether.

March 20

**Exodus 23:29-30 & Romans 11:33**

Our God is all-wise about all things. His wisdom knows no bounds and His plan is always in accordance with what He knows to be best. We see a great example of the intricacies of God's wise dealings with mankind in our passage today as the Lord records for the reader His design in giving the Promised Land to the Jews. In these precious verses, we are reminded of two truths: God's knowledge of the natural world and His love for His children.

First, we see the knowledge of the natural world. The Father knows that an uninhabited locality would be prime real estate for natural takeover! He states that a sudden victory would result in desolation which would give rise to the population of beasts which would prove to be a real obstacle and snare to the people. This is as "practical" of a thought as any I have ever read! Obviously, the Lord could have seen fit to keep the beasts at bay, but He chose instead to simply prevail, little by little, so that no locality would go without inhabitants for any length of time. Oh, the wisdom of God! Even the little, most minute, details are gloriously thought through in the Father's plan. There is no variable He hasn't considered and no loose end that He neglects to tie up!

Second, we see God's love for His children. He understood that overwhelming the people who currently inhabited the Promised Land only constituted part of the battle. Every square inch that was occupied by the Hittites, Canaanites and the like was going to have to be subdued and ruled by the Israelites in the future. This meant that structure and leadership and labor would have to be arranged so that the Promised Land would yield all that it could offer for the new residents. This task was monumental in its scope for the new citizens and, therefore, the Lord saw fit to move slowly so that they could catch up on the fly.

These two truths pair gloriously well when we seek to apply them to our lives. God is still wise and He still has a plan. That plan might move slower than you or I would desire but do not confuse slowness with inactivity or unfaithfulness! God is often moving at a pace that is dictated by His love for us. His plan unfolds for our good and sometimes what we most desire is outside of our finite grasp at the moment. Because God is wise, He knows these things and, therefore, He moves us along at a rate that we can sustain.

Some of you are praying for things today that you have yet to receive. Find joy in knowing that the Father is not going to give you what you cannot maintain! Instead, He may well be holding back or moving along more gently for the precise reason that you are not ready to handle all that He has for you... yet. Trust Him! Know that He is wise and all-knowing and loving and, therefore, whenever you receive an answer of "no" or "wait" you can know that His reply is rooted in love and wisdom.

March 21

**Exodus 23:31**

Today I want to speak to you about the Providence of God. Exodus 23 is slam full of statements from God about what He intends to accomplish through His people. There are numerous “I will” statements in this portion of the Bible and all of them refer to the Lord’s intent to accomplish His promises in His power! My goal for today is simple; I want us to see that God’s Providence is detailed in its nature and that His Providential plan is accomplished primarily by Him.

First, notice the detail of God’s plan. He states in verse 31 that He is going to set the border of Israel in very specific places. The land would stretch from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines and from the wilderness to the Euphrates River. These declarations are not vague, they are incredibly specific and they illuminate the truth that God is not just generally in control, He is absolutely and totally Sovereign over every detail of life and creation.

Folks, the Lord doesn’t have a foggy inkling of what your life is going to look like, He has a very specific plan. That plan includes many details that are all going to work out in accordance with His strategies and designs. My assumption is that the people of Israel heard this declaration and drew comfort in the knowledge that God had all things worked out and my hope is that we would reflect upon this revelation of His character and ability and find rest as well. While He has not given me the same level of detail about my own life, He has absolutely made promises to His children and we can rest in knowing that He will fulfill all that He promises.

Second, notice who it is that accomplishes this prophecy. God says, “I will set your border.” Now, some people struggle here because they see the involvement of the people of Israel in overwhelming their opponents and think, “God didn’t set the border, the people did!” This misconception is based on faulty thinking as it relates to primary and secondary causes. The primary reason why the nation of Israel was successful in driving out their enemies and inhabiting their land was the Lord’s intervention and faithful empowerment. He saw to it that the efforts of His people were rewarded. He gave the instructions for them to follow; He provided the breath and resources necessary to accomplish His will and He went before the people to see to it that all would work out accordingly.

Secondarily, the people of Israel followed His instructions and obeyed His precepts. They were active in their obedience, but the blessings all flowed from Him alone. This is crucial for our understanding today. We can become prideful and unstable when we confuse our secondary efforts with primary blessings! Folks, if the Lord has blessed you today, it is not chiefly because you “earned” your reward. He has seen fit to give you all that you have and when you see this, you have even further reason to bless Him for all of His goodness to you.

March 22

**Exodus 23:33**

Today's final devotion is dedicated to a topic that causes some believers quite a bit of consternation. The final verse of chapter 23 records God telling His people that "they (those who inhabited the Promised Land before Israel) shall not dwell in your land..." This sounds rather... heartless!

Why would a merciful and kind and benevolent God make such a declaration? Why would the Lord not desire for His people to mingle with the lost folks of these various people groups? The answer is actually given, explicitly, in the next clause when the Lord says, "lest they make you sin against me." God's stated desire to keep His people separate is made with a knowledge of their propensity to be influenced to sin! God knew that they were simply not strong enough to withstand the temptation to sin that would inevitably arise if the Jews tried to live alongside of the pagan nations.

The older I get, the more this kind of thinking makes sense to me. As a parent, there are many peers that I actively discourage my children from associating with for the exact reason that I am afraid that the negative influence will cause them to sin. As I consider my own history, I can clearly see the moments in my life that I wandered and how often a poor influence was central in my stupidity!

Stated differently, the statement that God makes can be construed as judgmental and hateful but only if it is seen from the wrong perspective. God's desire is rooted in a love for His children and a knowledge of their weakness. He knew that they would be led into the abyss and therefore He ordered them not to wander too close to the sinful morass of the pagans around them.

Sometimes we give ourselves far too much credit! I worry about some of you who don't seem to recognize your tendencies to be led astray. I worry that some of you hide behind flimsy statements about evangelism when, in reality, your presence around people who tempt you to sin rarely, if ever, leads to their conversion but almost always leads to your ruin!

Perhaps a bit of self-reflection is in order when we read passages like this one. Maybe the problem isn't the instruction, it's the estimation of our own ability which leads us to offense when God doesn't share our own rosy picture of the world around us. God is incredibly, unmistakably and always wise! He knows what He is doing and all of His instructions are rooted in His character. We would be wise to learn from Him and always interpret His instructions in light of His revealed righteousness. He is kind and loving and this is exactly why He didn't want His people around those who would lead them away from His goodness.