EXPOSITION OF EXODUS

Message #44

Exodus 23:10-19

When God was working with Israel as a nation, He specifically gave to her, not to the Church, Sabbath day rules and restrictions. These rules and restrictions are not given to us and, in fact, Paul would specifically tell us that we are not to yield for one second to Sabbath day mandates of do not handle, do not taste or touch (Col. 2:16). He said we are not to let anyone defraud us and we are not to submit to the Sabbath day decrees because Jesus Christ nailed them to the cross (Col. 2:14). The Sabbath days and festival days are gone (Col. 2:16) and now we have wonderful freedom in Christ.

But there are a group of people who just don’t get this point. They want to mix law into grace and Sabbath day stuff into Grace Age doctrine and it doesn’t fit and one clear evidence of that is what we have right here.

GOD GAVE ISRAEL SPECIFIC SABBATH DAY LAND LAWS AND REST LAWS AND FESTIVAL LAWS THAT SHE WAS TO OBSERVE.

J. Vernon McGee made a very interesting observation about Sabbath day things. He said that he observed that people who claim to be Sabbath day keepers ignore Sabbath year responsibilities. In other words, they pick some Sabbath day concepts but disregard Sabbath year concepts.

In this text of Scripture, God gives Israel a set of laws that pertain to the Sabbath (23:10–12), that pertain to speech (23:13) and that pertain to three annual festivals (23:14–19).

These laws that govern these days would remind His people of their relationship with Him and would lead them to worship and reflect on Him. The Sabbaths would do that at least once a week and the festivals would remind them they always need to keep their focus on God all the way through life.

Now there are four main series of laws presented here to Israel:

SERIES OF LAWS #1 – The laws regarding the Sabbath. 23:10-12

Now so far we know that Israel was not to pick up manna on the Sabbath day. She was to gather double the amount of manna on Friday and not go out to gather it on Saturday.

Now we gain some more data on this Sabbath day business. Keep in mind that Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). His point was that Sabbath observances, whether days or years, was given by God to Israel, as a means of helping them to relax and rest. This, however, was not a cessation of all activity.

This is what made the religious leaders so mad when Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath day (Matt. 12:10-14). They completely missed the point. The Sabbath day was given by God to Israel for her to relax and enjoy. It was not a day for strict inactivity.
Douglas Stewart said there are those who view themselves as “strict Sabbatarians in modern times.” He said not only are they theologically wrong, but they have missed the point and stress that no person is to do anything, rather than doing what is relaxing and doing things that refresh and restore you (*Exodus*, p. 530).

Now there are two more Sabbath day governing rules given here:

**Rule #1** - Sabbath day rules regarding the _land_. 23:10-11

When God gave these rules, the children of Israel were at Sinai and were obviously not farming anything. So these rules anticipated a time when Israel would be in her Promised Land of Canaan, once she conquered the land God would give her.

It is important to realize that almost all people farmed in Israel. It was an agricultural community. A farmer had the responsibility to let a field rest after six years. Now there is no law that would prevent him from staggering the years, so that he is resting one field, while working another. In fact, we would suggest that this would be necessary; otherwise, the poor people and animals would not have anything to eat for the other years.

Let’s say a farmer had three fields and he only worked one a year. Then the first field would be rested in year seven, but the second and third fields may be rested in years eight or nine respectively, depending on when the seventh year hit. In this way, the poor and animals would always have crops to eat that were in the Sabbath period.

The Sabbath land rule for Israel is that you can plant and harvest your crops for six years, but on the seventh year you are to let the land rest. This is true of the fields and also true of vineyards and olive groves. The reason for this is clearly stated in verse 11:
1) So _needy_ people may eat what grows in the field;
2) So _animals_ may eat from the field.

God gives these rules pertaining to agriculture, which does teach that successful, productive farming requires that the land be given some rest and not be cultivated. By letting the land remain dormant for a year, it would help not only the land, but also more importantly, it would help the poor people and the wildlife.

I know of a poor family who many years ago heated their house with coal. They would walk along the railroad tracks to pick up pieces of coal that had fallen off the railroad cars and they used that to help heat their house. This is the same principle.

Now it has been concluded, from an agri-science point of view, that by allowing the land to remain uncultivated for a year, more nitrogen causes grass to grow on the uncultivated field and in the long run it is good for the field.
But the purpose of the Sabbath year law was not about improving productivity, although it actually would do that. The purpose was to provide for poor people and animals.

So the purpose of the Sabbath was not to sit home thinking how we don’t dare move or crack a smile, it was about helping others. If we were to make some real Sabbath year application of this principle, it would be we are to work for six years and then not take a paycheck or any income in year 7 and let the poor and the needy have it. Of course, no modern day Sabbatarian would be willing to do this, which shows the ignorance people have about the Sabbath day.

Rule #2 - Sabbath day rules regarding work. 23:12

God not only deemed that resting a field was important every seventh year, but He also deemed that people and animals rested from work every seventh day.

Now this particular Sabbath day rule reiterates the fourth commandment given in Exodus 20:8-11. This was important to the welfare of the people and the animals. Do you see this point? The Sabbath day was about the rest and relaxation and refreshing of the animals and people so they could renew their physical as well as spiritual strength. The Sabbath day was not about rigid legalism; this was about doing things that refresh you.

This shows us how God cares not only for people but for the animals. He wanted the animals to have a time of rest, just as humans. Now most people who think they are to keep Sabbath days have no perspective of this at all.

SERIES OF LAWS #2 – The laws regarding speech. 23:13

Now there is a connection between the Sabbath day laws and this one. God demanded that no other deity but Him even be mentioned through the mouths of His people. There is only One God and God demands that only He be mentioned through the mouths of His people.

Years ago, a minister visited the home of someone who was a real legal Sabbatarian. This family thought it really kept the Sabbath day. The minister noticed that in the library was a book about Greek mythology. In that book were all kinds of invented deities. When the minister saw the book he asked the family about it. The wife replied that there were discussions in that book about Zeus, Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, Venus. The minister replied by asking would you say that you keep the Sabbath day? The reply was “yes” we keep the Sabbath day. Then he said well, how do you dare to even mention the names of false deities that are forbidden in the Word of God in a Sabbath day context. He made his point.

By the way, studying false deities seems to be an essential part of a liberal education. Studying them and naming them is a violation of the Law of God.
SERIES OF LAWS #3 – The laws regarding the festivals. 23:14-19

No matter what the dispensation, true Biblical worship requires corporate worship. All Israelite families were to gather together three times a year and participate in a worship service that was designed to offer adoration and praise to God. By the way, it is obvious that all of this was for Israel, not the Church. The specific promise to Israel was that if she would do this as a nation three times a year, God would in fact run foreign nations out of her land and expand her land borders (Ex. 34:23-24).

The three festivals mentioned here are:

**Festival #1** - The Feast of the Unleavened Bread. 23:15

The feast of the unleavened bread was to be a corporate gathering of Israel that occurred in the specific month of Abib (March-April) in which the people ate bread without any yeast for seven days. The purpose of this feast was historical. The people were to gather together and remember that God had delivered them from the land of Egypt and had brought them into the Promised Land.

**Festival #2** - The Feast of the Harvest of First Fruits. 23:16a

This particular harvest is often called the “feast of Pentecost.” This was a feast that was celebrated 50 days after the final day of the Passover, because that typically was when the first grain and wheat harvest were completed.

The Israelites were expected to bring their first fruit harvest offerings to the Lord, which featured the offering of animal sacrifices. The point is that the people were acknowledging that God had blessed them and given them harvest and they were putting and keeping Him first in the harvest.

**Festival #3** - The Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year. 23:16b

This particular feast is also known as the feast of booths or the feast of tabernacles. This was a gathering that occurred after the fall harvest of crops (September-October). Again, it is an acknowledgement that God had, in fact, blessed these people.

Now in verse 17, Moses tells the people that three times a year they are to appear before the “Lord GOD” (Adonai Jehovah). Three times a year they were to appear before the Sovereign God and Master over everything who is the covenant God of Israel.

SERIES OF LAWS #4 – The laws regarding protocol at these festivals. 23:18-19

There are four specific rules God would not permit at these gatherings:
Rule #1 - God would not allow blood sacrifices to be with leavened bread. 23:18a

There was to be no mixture of yeast in bread with the blood sacrifices. This law is so important that God repeats it again in Ex. 34:25. Apparently heathens mixed blood with bread and God says I forbid this practice.

Rule #2 - God would not allow fat of sacrifices to remain overnight until the next morning. 23:18b

Now the fat portions of the meat were supposed to be offered to God as a burnt offering. Apparently it was the practice of some to take the fat and keep it until the next day and use them for other purposes. God says, "I forbid that."

Rule #3 - God demanded that people bring the best first fruits to the house of the Lord. 23:19a

God wanted His people bringing Him their best. When the people brought God their crop and tithe offerings to God, the people could bring a less quality offering and keep the best for themselves. God says I want the best you have. God did not want leftovers. The first and the best of one’s harvest was due God.

Rule #4 - God would not allow a young goat to be boiled in the milk of its mother. 23:19b

There was a Canaanite fertility practice that invented some religious rituals that they thought would make things more productive for harvest and this was one of those practices. The legend was if you mixed the mother’s milk in with the goat being boiled, you would be guaranteed a better harvest.

Now let us remind ourselves that Israel promised that they would do everything God wanted her to do. Well, she has not done it and neither have we. Thank God for Jesus Christ because He took that law and nailed it to the cross and when we believe on Him we are saved.