

SESSION #50 (5 April 2011) Deut 23:19-23; The Rights of Economic Freedom & Promisee Expectation

I. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

1:1-5	Introduction to God’s spokesman, the 1 st Prophet Moses
1:6-4:40	1 st Exposition of the Torah = <u>motivation</u> to obey from (1) <u>past gracious actions</u> of Yahweh and (2) <u>sovereign destiny</u> of the nation (<u>future gracious actions</u> of Yahweh)
4:41-49	Editorial comment on context of 2 nd Exposition of the Torah
5:1-26:19	2 nd Exposition of the Torah = proper response to Yahweh in heart and soul
5:1-11:32	Loving Yahweh with <u>all the heart</u>
12:1-26:19	Loving Yahweh with <u>all the soul</u> (<i>nephesh</i> =life)
12:1-13:18	Theological unity of Israel’s tribes and its Enforcement (esp 1 st , 2 nd , and by implication the corresponding 9 th , 10 th commandments)
14:1-21	Enforcement of Distinct Cultural Sustenance from Life to Death (a witness consistent with Yahweh’s name, see 3 rd commandment)
14:22-16:17	A Distinct Culture of Theocentric Faith in God’s Economic Order (with emphasis upon the 4 th and by implication the corresponding 8 th commandment)
16:18-18:22	A Distinct Culture of Human Authority Under God’s Justice (emphasis upon human authority starting in the home—the 5 th commandment and by implication the 7 th commandment)
19:1-21:23	Protocols for Implementing True “Social Justice” (emphasis upon dealing with deployment of civil authority’s lethal force—6 th commandment)
22:1-23:18	A Distinct Culture of Life-Protecting Boundaries (emphasis upon purity of national life—the context of the 7 th commandment)
23:19-24:7	A Distinct Culture of Respect for “Human Rights” (emphasis upon the implications of the 8th commandment)
	23:19-20 The Right of Economic Freedom
	23:21-23 The Right of a Promisee to Expect
Performance	

- This section deals with the breadth of implications of “thou shalt not steal,” the 8th commandment. Stealing doesn’t just refer to taking property; it also can refer to taking away [the freedom] that God has given—in this case the “free lifestyle” of theocratic citizens.
- Today we refer to certain rights as “property rights,” “animal rights,” “gay rights,” even “plant rights,” *but there are no such “rights” objectively unless those rights exist prior to man’s decision to [recognize] them.*
- Epistemologically, we [discover] prior-existing truths; we don’t [invent] such truths out of the resources of our minds (subjectivism). Similarly, ethically we [recognize] “human rights” as given by God; we don’t [grant] them as though we create them and then give them to others.
- Stealing is seen in this section to include taking away God-given rights besides physical property.

II. THE “RIGHT” OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM (23:19-20)

This parallels **15:1-8** (see outline above).

Economy of theocratic Israel demonstrated what “redemption” means: citizens were not to be debt-slaves. Slavery was not racial, not from kidnapping, not from slave trade; it was from indebtedness (**Prov. 22:7** “*The rich rules over the poor; and the borrower is slave to the lender.*”)

Historical event-picture: [servitude in Egypt and Exodus] [revelation by word & deed]

Background: 3 basic groups w/resp to the theocracy

People Group	Status
Israelite (family unit)	Fully responsible for obedience to Yahweh’s law out of gratitude for His deliverance from Egypt; full inheritance title to tribal land; receiver of “contract” graces
Widow, orphan	Lacked inheritance title because of isolation from a family unit, but received some “contract” graces
<i>Ger</i> (“resident alien”)	Gentile who voluntarily chose to join Israel and submit to Yahweh’s rule; lacked inheritance title because not a descendent of the sons of Jacob, but received some “contract” graces
<i>Nokree</i> (“foreigner”)	Gentile who lived temporarily in Israel—probably due to business—and did not receive “contract” blessings

23:19-20 shall not charge interest to your brother. . .that Yahweh your God may bless you. . .

Why this purpose clause incentive? Let’s look at loan-dynamics.

These are charitable loans—not business loans.

1. Parallel passage like **Deut 15:1-8** shows that this statute applies to “poor” Israelites, not to every Israelite; not to the foreigner (*nokree*) → limited charitable loan.
2. Jesus distinguishes between charitable and business loans (**Luke 6:34-35** vs **Matt 25:27**).

Let’s look at loaning money in general:

Interest Rate Component	Domestic (Israel)	Foreign (pagan nations)
risk of default	lower due to <i>personal integrity</i> (Ps 37:21)	higher due to <i>lack of integrity</i>
forfeiture of present use of money	optimistic about the future (God’s linear progress) so <i>invest for the future</i>	pessimistic about the future (pagan cyclic view of history) so <i>spend now while you can enjoy it</i>
inflation premium	<i>inflation forbidden</i> by 8 th and 9 th commandments (Lev 19:35-36; Isa 1:22)	<i>inflation ubiquitous</i> in ancient pagan world (coin clipping, mixing base metals with silver and gold) <i>theft from all holders of the currency</i>

Interest on money or food or anything that is lent out

Expecting interest is not different than expecting [rent]: both involve borrowing an asset for a time period. The borrower is getting to use someone else's [property].

Qualification for a charitable loan:

- Must be poor (defined [absolutely] “*an insufficiency of the material necessities of life; having little or no means to support oneself,*” not [relatively] compared to national wealth as is done today to justify growth of government).
- Must be a citizen of the theocracy, i.e. one living as a “[redeemed one].”

Obligations of the borrower:

- Must pay it off as much as possible before the Sabbatical year (cf **Deut 15:7-10**)
- Risked non-payment, which would result in servitude for as much as 6 years, and being viewed as evil, which invited civil authorities' intervention for violation of a contract (**Ps. 37:21**)

Promise to the lender:

- God will bless him (**Deut 15:10; 23:20**)—tight ethical cause-effect under the Sinaitic contract.

Error of medieval Church: failing to distinguish between [charitable] and [business] loans because of the false view that all usury was evil.

Interest could be charged to a *nokree* because he lived outside the Kingdom of God model.

- The Sabbatical cycle did not apply to him; the loan was permanent until paid.
- Loaning foreigners interest expanded the theocratic economy and led to cultural conquest (**Deut 15:6**).

Summary: The “redeemed” are not to become enslaved; when circumstances threaten their well-being, they are to be “delivered” by a loan that they can work their way out of. *Their redemption gives them the right of economic freedom, which is not given to those outside of the Kingdom because economic reality reveals spiritual reality.*

Principle in church age: “*Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his bowels from him, how does the love of God abide in him? . . . by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him.*” **1 John 3:16-19**

Notice that:

- the action is analogous to God rescuing us from the servitude to sin and Satan
- the action is directed toward fellow [believers], not the world at large
- that these believers are genuinely poor without family support and unable to work (**1 Tim. 5:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:10**).

III. THE RIGHT OF A PROMISEE TO EXPECT PERFORMANCE (23:21-23)

Analogy between God's contractual oaths & men's contracts → prohibition of contract violations → a promise creates a right to expect performance.

A. Abrahamic Contract (Gen. 15:9-21)

This contract was not conditional in the sense that the whole program would be fulfilled only because God Himself would so work it out in history. Example of [divine election]: doesn't negate human responsibility, but God as Creator is the sole author of the story—it isn't a joint project between God and man as equal parties!!

Oath is an "oath of malediction" = just punishment upon the promisor. This oath obligated God to those who would make costly [life-decisions] to trust Him to perform the promises: land, seed, world-wide blessing (**Heb. 6:16-18**).

B. Contract Between Men (Josh 9-10; 2 Sam. 21)

Oath-taking done with contracts between men, but in Israel they were taken very seriously. Here is a 400+ year drama involving an oath that should never have been taken.

Josh 9:1-15 Gibeonite deception

9:16-19 sworn to them by Yahweh

It can't be undone, so the Gibeonites are made into involuntary vassals—slaves as punishment for deception; they "owed" Israel for the economic cost—

- (1) their forgone cities' buildings (v26);
- (2) the cost to adjust to their presence (disruption in the non-conformity to Yahwehism and danger of pagan influence upon Israel);
- (3) the cost to protect them (chap 10).

10:6 don't forsake your slaves

10:7-14 no day like that

God came to the nation's aid in remaining loyal to a contract sworn in Yahweh's name. 400 years later.....

2 Sam 21:1 drought. . .three years. . .inquired of Yahweh

See blessings/cursings of **Deut. 28**.

Saul and his house of bloodshed

Saul disregarded the Word of God at major points in his career as 1st king. Evidently his sons went along with this crime (like Saddam's sons???)

21:3 atonement. . .that you might bless the inheritance of Yahweh

God listens to just objections against His people.

21:4-6 no silver or gold from [Saulide Dynasty]. . .his descendents. . .

Focus upon the family life of Saul, not their economic assets. These descendents never disassociated themselves from their father/grandfather's dynastic establishment which would have cost them economically and, perhaps, socially.

Cutting off part of Saul's family inheritance in the Kingdom (like us losing rewards because of our sin).

21:7 spared Mephibosheth. . .because of Yahweh's oath

Another oath!!

21:8-9 hanged. . .before Yahweh. . .

Lex taliones: “life for life,” not “money for life”

Deut 23:21 vow to Yahweh. . .surely require. . .shall be a sin

God holds us responsible for our words such that lack of performance = theft.

23:22 abstain. . .not sin

Oaths are voluntary, even with God.

23:23 has gone from your lips. . .keep and perform. . .

Have you ever thought of “theft” in this light? *A promise given is a debt owed.*

Why? Because *the promisee makes economically important decisions assuming certainty of [performance]*. If the performance fails, then *he is owed for the added costs of acting on the promise.*

Economic consequences of a society where contractual promises are routinely kept → economic predictability → greater wealth.

“After a man speaks, his subsequent actions are supposed to confirm his words, for God's actions invariably confirm His words. A man's actions are to testify to the reliability of his words. The more reliably he speaks, the greater his productivity because of his greater value to others. Other men can make plans confidently in terms of his words. Greater predictability makes cooperation less expensive. . . Where the price of something drops, more of it will be demanded. . . Contracts lower the costs of cooperation, thereby increasing the amount of cooperation demanded.” G. North, Deuteronomy

“The social division of labor increases as a result of the predictability of men's words. . . Increased social cooperation increases the division of labor and therefore increases men's individual productivity and income. . . Individual output per unit of input increases. Men grow wealthier. Greater wealth makes the tools of dominion more affordable.” G. North, Deuteronomy

A culture with integrity of language → develops [contracts] and a legal framework around them. Christianity spawned the Western concept of law.

IV. CONCLUSION

Since promissory speech creates debt which obligates us financially, emotionally, and physically, it behooves us to use such speech very carefully. . .especially promissory speech to God.

Thus Jesus warned:

“You have heard it said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ ‘No’. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” (Matt. 5:34-37)

Pharisaical teaching: reduction of sin to overt behavior, ignoring the heart attitudes and the larger implications.

Example: not guilty of killing if you didn't commit overt murder; ignores:
(1) inner mental attitude before God of hatred of those made in God's image (**Matt. 5:21-26**) and
(2) the social implications spelled out in **Deut. 19:1-21:23** --*protocols for implementing true "social justice"* (care for judicial proceedings, use of military force, dealing with unsolved murder, protection of the family inheritance).

Pharisees on oaths:

- (1) "not swear falsely" = straightforward perjury
- (2) "perform your oaths to the Lord" = restricted to certain kinds of oaths

/////// SLIDE #6 //////[Lloyd-Jones quote]

"[The Pharisees] drew a distinction between various oaths, saying that some were binding while others were not. If you took an oath by the temple, that was not binding; but if you took an oath by the gold of the temple, that was binding. If you took an oath by the altar you need not keep it; but if you took an oath by the gift that was on the altar then it was absolutely binding." Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, I, 266

Jesus deals with the inner mental attitude:

Oaths not needed in ordinary conversation if [integrity of language] exists; oaths can become a substitute for unreliable speech (neither he nor the apostles abstained from oath-taking for important matters—Jesus accepted legitimacy of oaths in His trial—**Matt. 26:63**—and Paul used oaths in addressing local churches—**Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23**).

Moses deals with the social implications:

Illegitimate oath-taking creates unnecessary ["IOUs"] with God first, and by inference with others—not just upfront lying/perjury but long-term theft.