DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 23

*Exclusion From the Assembly*

**No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord. 2 No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. 3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. 4 For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. 5 However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. 6 Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live. 7 Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country. 8 The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the Lord.**

**23:1–8** Heritage and identity were passed on through the father, who was circumcised as a member of the assembly of the Lord or who lived outside the boundaries of that covenant (cf Gn 17:1–4). The prohibitions here are focused on males. Women and girls could be assimilated into Israel more easily, as various examples show (Nu 31:18–20; Dt 21:10–14). However, note the issues raised by marriage with foreign women described in Ezr 9. (TLSB)

**23:1** For blessings on eunuchs in later times see Isa 56:4–5; Ac 8:26–39. (CSB)

Likely refers to voluntary self-mutilation that could be identified with paganism—the sign of submission to another god. (TLSB)

*assembly*. Hbr *qahal*. Convened to officially transact business (war, crowning a king, adjudicating legal cases, parceling land) and for worship. (TLSB)

**23:2–3** *down to the tenth generation.* Perhaps forever, since ten is symbolic of completeness or finality. In v. 6 the equivalent expression is “as long as you live” (lit. “all your days forever”). (CSB)

**23:2** *forbidden union*. Likely refers to a son from incest, from a cult prostitute, or from a mixed marriage with certain foreigners (e.g., Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites). (TLSB)

*to the tenth generation*. Forever. (TLSB)

**23:3–6** Permanent prohibition from the assembly for male descendants of Moab and Ammon who were living in the land of Israel as resident aliens. (TLSB)

**23:3** Ruth is an outstanding exception to Moabite exclusion from Israel (see Introduction to Ruth: Theme and Theology). (CSB)

**23:4** *Balaam son of Beor.* See Nu 22:4–24:25. (CSB)

**23:6** *Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them.* See the prophets’ denunciation of Moab, Ammon and Edom (Isa 15–16; Jer 48:1–49:6; Eze 25:1–11; Am 1:13–2:3; Zep 2:8–11). (CSB)

**23:7–8** Those covered by this command were not to be treated as unclean forever. (TLSB)

*abhor*. Hbr is from the same root as “abomination” and is used generally of ritual uncleanness. (TLSB)

**23:7** *Edomite … your brother.* Edom (Esau) is often condemned for his hostility against his brother Jacob (Israel; see Am 1:11; Ob 10; see also notes on Ge 25:22, 26). (CSB)

**23:1–8** The regulations given here prohibit certain nations from entering and taking part in the assembly of Israel. Other foreigners are to be treated more leniently. The worship of God is a serious matter (cf Ps 51:17). Today, all who approach Him with broken hearts are received by Him, for “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). • Lord Jesus Christ, blessed Savior of all, thank You for reconciling me to God, making peace between us through the blood of Your cross, and for inviting me to Your “assembly,” Your Church, to partake of Your life-giving gifts. Amen. (TLSB)

*Uncleanness in the Camp*

**9 When you are encamped against your enemies, keep away from everything impure. 10 If one of your men is unclean because of a nocturnal emission, he is to go outside the camp and stay there. 11 But as evening approaches he is to wash himself, and at sunset he may return to the camp. 12 Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. 13 As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. 14 For the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you.**

**23:9–14** Sanitary rules for Israel’s military camps. For similar rules for the people in general see Lev 15. (CSB)

During a military campaign, the soldiers were to keep the camp ritually clean (e.g., toilet facilities were to be kept outside the camp and excrement covered up). The purpose is hygienic but also relates directly to the presence of the Lord walking in the camp (v 14). (TLSB)

**23:9** *evil thing*. Apparently not morally evil, but unclean and unbecoming. (TLSB)

**23:10** *nocturnal emission*. Perhaps simply urination (not necessarily a parallel to Lv 15:16). (TLSB)

**23:9–14** When Israel was at war, the Lord’s presence among them was to be recognized and respected by keeping the camp holy, free from anything unclean and unbecoming. Since God is always with us, we dare not live as though He is not present or in ways that would dishonor Him. In Christ, we are assured that His love, forgiveness, and grace are always present and that He stands with us in our daily life as our sure defense. • O Lord God, thanks and praise to You that, as the new Israel, we are Your people, whom You save, sanctify, and grant ultimate victory. Amen (TLSB)

*Miscellaneous Laws*

**15 If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. 16 Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him. 17 No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. 18 You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God to pay any vow, because the Lord your God detests them both. 19 Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. 20 You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a brother Israelite, so that the Lord your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess. 21 If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. 22 But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. 23 Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth. 24 If you enter your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. 25 If you enter your neighbor’s grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.**

**23:15–16** Escaped slaves from foreign countries could settle wherever they wished in Israel (all Israel was to be considered a sanctuary). They were not reduced to slavery again in Israel. Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord prohibited extradition treaties with foreign powers. (TLSB)

**23:15** *If a slave has taken refuge.* A foreign slave seeking freedom in Israel (see v. 16). Cf. 24:7. (CSB)

**23:17–18** See notes on Ex 34:15–16. (CSB)

**23:17** *cult prostitute*. Lit, “holy one.” Pagan religions among Israel’s neighbors employed religious prostitutes for the fertility rituals of their deities. (TLSB)

**23:18** *male prostitute.* Lit. “dog” (see NIV text note), a word often associated with moral or spiritual impurity (cf. Mt 7:6; 15:26; Php 3:2). (CSB)

*wages of a dog*. Possibly indicating worship of foreign gods.

**23:19** *interest.* See notes on Ex 22:25–27; Lev 25:36. (CSB)

Loans were made to alleviate poverty, but a fellow Israelite’s need was not to become an opportunity for another’s gain (cf Lv 25:35–36). Ambrose: “Is it not a wicked thing to demand under the guise of kindly feeling a larger sum from him who has not the means to pay off a less amount?” (*NPNF* 2 10:70). (TLSB)

*brother*. Fellow Israelite. (TLSB)

**23:20** *charge a foreigner.* A foreign businessman would come into Israel for financial advantage and so would be subject to paying interest. (CSB)

Likely in Israel as traders and merchants. (TLSB)

**23:21–23** See notes on Nu 30; see also Ecc 5:4–6. (CSB)

**23:24–25** God demands charity and hospitality but protects the owner from being taken advantage of. Such an attitude of charity and hospitality toward others is also expected of NT believers (cf Rm 12:9–13; Gal 6:10; Heb 13:2; Jas 2:14–18; 1Pt 4:8–11). (TLSB)

**23:15–25** Miscellaneous laws encourage love for God and compassion for others. God’s moral Law governs all our behavior and relationships. To transgress any part of His Law is to place ourselves at odds with Him, to sin against Him, and to incur His wrath. However, “we love because He first loved us” (1Jn 4:19), as He demonstrated in the exodus of Israel and in the cross of His Son. • Lord God, help me to show my thankfulness by a reverent and cheerful obedience to Your will and by a steadfast trust in Your loving-kindness and unfailing mercy, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)