

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 23

*Those Excluded from the Assembly*

**“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD. 2 “No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD. 3 “No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, 4 because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. 6 You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever. 7 “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a sojourner in his land. 8 Children born to them in the third generation 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** *even 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)

**23:6** *Do not seek their peace.* 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). (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, then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing. **10** “If any man among you becomes unclean because of a nocturnal emission, then he shall go outside the camp. He shall not come inside the camp, **11** but when evening comes, he shall bathe himself in water, and as the sun sets, he may come inside the camp. **12** “You shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out to it. **13** And you shall have a trowel with your tools, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it and turn back and cover up your excrement. **14** Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you 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** “You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. **16** He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him. **17** “None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, and none of the sons of Israel shall be a cult prostitute. **18** You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. **19** “You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest. **20** You

may charge a foreigner interest, but you may not charge your brother interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 21 “If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. 22 But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. 23 You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth. 24 “If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in your bag. 25 If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's 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** *not give up to his master's a slave who has escaped.* A foreign slave seeking freedom in Israel (see v. 16). Cf. 24:7. (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** *fee of a prostitute.* Lit. “dog,” a word often associated with moral or spiritual impurity (cf. Mt 7:6; 15:26; Php 3:2). (CSB)

**23:19** *interest.* 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)

**23:24–25** 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)