

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-  
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.  
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 13**

**DEUTERONOMY**

**CHAPTERS 23 & 24**

**INTRODUCTION**

God is interested in every aspect of the life of His people. He created man and He has given very good laws that concern man's conduct and behaviour and his relationship with others even on a personal level. Deuteronomy 23 and 24 record the legislation that relates to the living standards of the covenant people of God. Israel indeed is privileged to have these laws first given to them by God through Moses. Although these laws were given more than three thousand years ago, a careful study of them will reveal that they are not archaic as some would want us to believe, but that they are as valid today as ever. If only all the nations of the world would heed these great laws or follow their time-honoured principles, the world would be a much better and peaceful place. Our study should profit us individually in building our character and conduct that we might live God-honouring lives. Our study should also benefit us collectively as the covenant community so that others, who see us as we obey God and receive His blessings, may be drawn to the

Lord Jesus Christ and receive the same blessings.

These two chapters deal with personal holiness and cleanliness, runaway slaves, prostitution, loans to a brother and others, vows, charity, divorce, newly married couple, kidnapping, infectious disease, justice and care for the poor and needy.

**OUTLINE**

**A. The People Who Were Not Admitted into the Congregation of the LORD (23:1-8)**

1. The person who had been castrated (23:1).
2. The illegitimate child (23:2).
3. An Ammonite or a Moabite (23:3-6).
  - a) To the tenth generation (3).
  - b) Because they did not help Israel in their time of need (4a).
  - c) Because they hired Balaam to curse Israel (4b).
  - d) But the LORD turned their curse to blessing for His people's sake (5).
  - e) They should not seek their peace and prosperity (6).
4. The third generation of the children of an Edomite or an Egyptian (23:7-8).

**B. The Soldiers Must Keep the Purity of the Camp (23:9-14)**

1. The injunction to keep the purity of the camp (23:9).
2. A person who was unclean in the night was barred from

remaining in the camp until the evening and after he had ceremonially washed himself (23:10-11).

3. A person must release his excrement outside the camp in a hole and cover it (23:12-13).
4. They must do these because the LORD God was in their midst (23:14).

### **C. Miscellaneous Laws Relating to the Life of the Covenant Community (23:15-24:22)**

1. An escaped slave from a foreign land should not be returned to his master (23:15-16).
2. Religious prostitution was prohibited (23:17-18).
3. Loans must be given without interest (23:19-20).
4. Vows must be speedily fulfilled (23:21-23).
5. Fruit of the vineyard or grain of the field could be eaten by traveller (23:24-25).
6. An Israelite who divorced his wife could not remarry her (24:1-4).
7. A newly wed was exempted from military service for one year (24:5).
8. A millstone could not be taken for collateral (24:6)
9. Kidnapping carried a capital punishment (24:7).
10. Laws governing leprosy must be strictly observed (24:8-9).
11. Collateral taken from borrowers must be done with respect and human dignity (24:10-13).
12. A poor hired servant must be charitably cared for (24:14-15).

13. A child might not be punished for his father's sin and vice versa (24:16).

14. The needs of aliens, orphans, and widows must be charitably met (24:17-22).

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **Admission into the Assembly of the LORD**

The LORD God gave Israel specific laws concerning those who might not "enter into the congregation of the LORD." This is generally understood as the occasion when the Israelites assembled together to worship God. Certain people were not allowed to be among the congregation. The first category of people who were forbidden to join the congregation of the LORD was a man who had been castrated and a bastard. Castration was a religious practice by Canaanites as an expression of devotion to their gods. A bastard was born to temple cult prostitutes, another ancient religious practice. An Ammonite or Moabite might not enter into the congregation of the LORD because their forefathers were hostile to Israel and had engaged Balaam, a diviner, to curse Israel. However, Edomites, who were descendants of Esau, and Egyptians were allowed in their third generation. Such restriction was to keep the Israel's testimony to God's holiness. It was also designed to keep Israel from being influenced by pagan religious practices. God reveals His holiness and purity and the privilege of drawing near to Him and worshipping Him must not be taken for granted. It is not at the

pleasure of the worshipper. There is nothing common between God and the other gods. There should be no fellowship with these people. Today, no one may come to God and worship Him if he or she is not cleansed by the blood Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And the way to obtain this wonderful privilege is by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

### **Personal Cleanliness**

When Israel went to war, it was important that they kept their military camp free from uncleanness that might cause diseases. A soldier, who “by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night,” must be quarantined the next day until the evening. He must wash himself with water before he could rejoin the others. The form of uncleanness is not indicated. When a soldier wanted to excrete, he must go out of the camp, dig a hole and ease himself. After which, he must cover the hole. Human excrement should not be left openly exposed. The reason to keep this legislation was that God was present in their midst and they should keep the camp “holy” and clean. Holiness will result in personal cleanliness. He who is holy within will dress neatly and smartly without. His environment and home will be clean and fresh, reflecting what he is like inside.

### **Runaway Slaves & Prostitutes**

A runaway slave from a foreign country who sought refuge in Israel must not be repatriated to his master. Instead, God commanded Israel to allow him to live in one of the cities where he chose. He was free and must not be exploited.

This legislation was in opposition to the laws of the other pagan countries that would return the slave to his master. Israel should give refuge to him.

There should be no female or male prostitutes in Israel. The other nations practised temple prostitution. Such a practice was forbidden by God. Any monetary benefits obtained from these practices or even the price of a dog could not be used for any vow made to God. They are an abomination to the LORD. God will not accept filthy lucre for His offering even by His own people.

### **Lending a Brother**

In those days, there was not a complex financial and commercial system as we have today. We buy many things on hire-purchase, and get loans from banks and pay an interest on them. Among the Israelites in those days, there were also poor people. When a poor Israelite was in need of money, he could only seek help from his wealthier fellow brethren. The wealthier Israelite should lend his poor brother and not charge an interest on the loan. In fact whatever he lent the poor brother, not necessarily money, he must not charge any fee or interest. Only when he lent a resident foreigner was he allowed to charge an interest. The reason for this legislation is that God had blessed His people. The source of their wealth is God. They should freely loan their wealth to their own needy brethren. God in turn promised to bless them in their work. This is a practical expression of the wealthier Israelite's own thankfulness to God. Christians today should practise this principle. We have heard many a rich

Christian testify or pray that all that he has comes from the hand of God. If he truly means it, then God should have a part if not all of his wealth. The God-pleasing and practical way of showing his gratitude to God is to help his poor brethren. Note that he is not asked to give but to lend without interest. In other words, when his poor brother is blessed of God later, he will pay back his loan!

When a brother lent another, he could take a pledge (24:6, 10-13). But there were certain things that he could not take as a pledge or collateral. He must not take the millstone as collateral. The millstone was the livelihood of the borrower. If he took that, it was like taking his life. He had no means of sustaining himself and improving his means to repay the lender. The principle is that we must not take the person's means of livelihood as collateral that will cause him or his family to starve or go deeper into debt.

In the choice of collateral, the lender was not allowed to enter the lender's house to take whatever he wanted. He had to stay outside of the house, and the lender fetched him the collateral. This proviso in the law protects the self-respect of the person. If the borrower gave his clothes as collateral, the lender was allowed to keep the collateral only in the daytime. He must return the garment to the borrower in the evening so that the latter could keep himself warm. Indeed, the borrower would bless him. And in the sight of God, it would be a righteous act—the right thing to do. God would be pleased. A poor person is not to be despised or looked down upon or taken advantage of. A poor person should be helped. God blesses

those who honour Him and obey His word.

### **Making a Vow**

When an Israelite makes a vow to the LORD, it was required of him to expeditiously fulfil his vow. He should not delay in doing so. If he did not fulfil his vow to the Lord, then it would be a sin. However, if he did not make a vow unto the LORD, it is not a sin. God imposes on His people that they must speak with honesty and sincerity. This rule emphasizes the importance of our spoken word. God's word is utterly reliable. So must His children's word. Our word must be trustworthy and dependable.

### **Neighbourly Generosity**

When an Israelite was to tread across the vineyard or the corn field of another Israelite, he was free to pick the grapes to eat them or pluck the corn to satisfy his hunger. The owner must extend this privilege to his brethren. It must not be denied. Again we see that the source of the abundance of the owner's vineyard and field is God who gives the increase. However, the traveller was forbidden to harvest the grapes and corn. To do so would constitute as theft. In this way, no one was hungry in Israel. May it be so that today in our churches, there is no Christian brother who has to beg for food in the street. We have a responsibility to feed our hungry brethren for our blessings come from God.

### **Divorce & the Newly Wed**

According to the law given here, divorce was permitted if the wife had lost favour with her husband (24:1). The reason for the divorce

is that he had found “some uncleanness in her.” What precisely was the nature of the uncleanness is not indicated. Our Lord Jesus’ comment is appropriate. Divorce was allowed according to the Lord Jesus Christ on two grounds, adultery or fornication. In His comment on the “bill of divorcement” given by Moses, our Lord Jesus Christ commented that it was because of the hardness of the heart of the people that Moses issued the bill of divorce. Divorce was permitted in the Old Testament. But the husband could not divorce his wife on any pretext. It must be something indecent about her. The law of divorce here protected the woman. A proper bill of divorce must be given to the woman. She could prove that she was divorced and could remarry. Without such a certificate of divorcement, she would be open to slanderous attacks especially by her former husband who might even accuse her of adultery. Now when she remarried she could not press her husband to let her return to her husband by the first marriage. The law forbade her husband by the first marriage to marry her again. The law made it clear that she could not remarry him.

A newly wed couple was given special privileges. The newly wed bridegroom was exempted from military service for one full year. The reason is that he should “cheer up his wife” (24:5). We can safely think of good reasons for such legislation. Should the husband be sent to war in the first year, he might be killed. She might be widowed at a very young age and deprived of the joy of her husband and the home in the first year. The sending away of the husband for a

prolonged period might jeopardize the stability of the marriage. This one year exemption gave the newly wed time to build and strengthen their new relationship. God’s laws are wonderful.

### **Protecting the Poor**

God always has a heart for the poor and needy. An Israelite could hire a servant who was poor and needy, be he a fellow Israelite, or a resident foreigner. But he must pay the poor hired servant his wage daily after he had performed the work. The servant must not be exploited. If the employer failed to pay the servant at the end of the day, the LORD would take him into account; it would be a sin unto him, when the poor servant cried to the LORD (24:15). The principle in this teaching is that those of us who are employers must pay the wages of our employees on time. We must not delay in compensating that which is due to the servant. This is a good principle to remember and practise. Do unto others what you want other to do unto you. Do you like people to owe you money?

### **Justice for the Defenceless**

Fathers should not be punished for the sins of their children. Similarly children should not be punished for the sins of their fathers. Every man is punished for his own sin (24:16)

Moreover, there must not be any perversion in the judgement of the resident foreigner, the fatherless or orphans, and the widow. A widow’s garment must not be taken as collateral (24:17).

### **The Poor, Orphans & Widows**

When a farmer harvests his field, and had forgotten a sheaf in

the field, he should not return to the field to pick up the sheaf. It should be left for the resident foreigner, the fatherless, and the widows. For the LORD had blessed the farmer and would continue to bless him if he observed this law. The same rule applied for picking his olives and harvesting his grapes. What was left on the olive trees and on the vineyard must not be collected again clean. These fruits which missed the harvesting must be left for the poor, the orphans and the widows. God reminded them twice that they were once slaves in the land of Egypt. They had suffered much in Egypt. The LORD God had redeemed them from Egypt. And they must obey this commandment to remember the poor and needy by being charitable and kind.

His people abundantly.  
AMEN.

### **SUMMARY**

Our God has an eye for details. Every aspect of our character and conduct must reflect His goodness. Therefore the practice of the presence of God in our lives is not only God honouring but also necessary if we expect God to bless us. And God promises that He will bless us even more when we obey Him by being charitable, kind and generous. God is concerned for the poor and needy. The world despises and disdains those who are poor and needy. But God cares for them. Christians individually and corporately must demonstrate these characteristics of our Lord and God. In chapter 23, the main theme is that of being kind to one's fellow brethren whereas in chapter 24, the unifying theme is God's protection of His people. May we learn these precious principles and apply them in our daily life, and God blesses

**DAILY READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Deuteronomy 23:1-9; Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:16

**TUESDAY:** Deuteronomy 23:10-16; Psalm 24:1-10

**WEDNESDAY:** Deuteronomy 23:17-25; Matthew 5:37; James 5:12

**THURSDAY:** Deuteronomy 24:1-16; Mark 10:2-9

**FRIDAY:** Deuteronomy 24:17-22; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Matthew 18:32-33

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What does this section remind us about God?

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2. What failures in moral behaviour are condemned in this chapter?

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3. What concerns does God show in these verses?

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4. What social problems are brought up in this section?

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5. How do the laws concerning these problems protect and encourage the Israelites?

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6. Write two or three words which you think would best summarise what Chapter 23 is all about?

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7. What reasons can you think why a man who is newly married was exempted military service for one year?

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8. How should a brother who lends another poor brother treat him today?

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9. What three categories of people are God especially concerned with?

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10. What Christian character and conduct are taught?

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11. How were the Israelites encouraged to obey the various laws in Chapter 24 which inculcate kindly behaviour?

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12. What commands in these two chapters would you say are the most important for Christians today to remember and obey?

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