

Background Scripture: Exodus 23

Print Passage: Exodus 23:1-12

Impartial Actions



WHEN MARY JANE (M.J.) WENT TO VISIT HER GRANDMOTHER IN SOUTH AFRICA, SHE WAS GONE FOR TWO MONTHS—AS SHE COULD NOT TRAVEL BACK BECAUSE THE BORDERS WERE CLOSED DUE TO HEALTH CONCERNS IN THE UNITED STATES. M.J. was provided with the home-

work assignments, but because of Internet-connection issues in the area where her grandmother lives in South Africa, she fell behind in the assignments. When M.J. returned, the teacher was giving a mid-term exam. M.J. began crying, saying that she was not ready to take a mid-term exam. The teacher gave all the homework assignments to M.J. to begin studying for the test, but M.J. still felt that she could not catch up with the rest of the class. She talked to her friend Dashi, and Dashi began helping M.J. with the assignments every evening on a video conference platform.

M.J. became anxious and asked Dashi if she could bend the rules by taking the test for her online. Dashi had heard of others who helped their classmates pass tests, but she knew it was cheating. M.J. also thought that it was wrong that the teacher expected her to catch up on two months worth of homework in order to take the mid-term exam. Dashi did not give M.J. an answer right away but, instead, said that she would get back to her. Dashi knew that God expects believers to care for others, but cheating was not part of the “caring” that God expects. Dashi did recommend to M.J. that she and her parents should go to the teacher and discuss it.

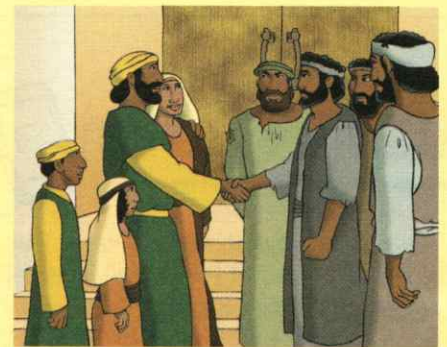
When M.J. and her mother talked to the teacher, the teacher agreed to make an exception and give M.J. another week to prepare for the test. The teacher explained to M.J.’s mother that usually she does not make adjustments for unprepared students, but in this case, it was the right thing to do because of issues that M.J. could not control.



WORD UP

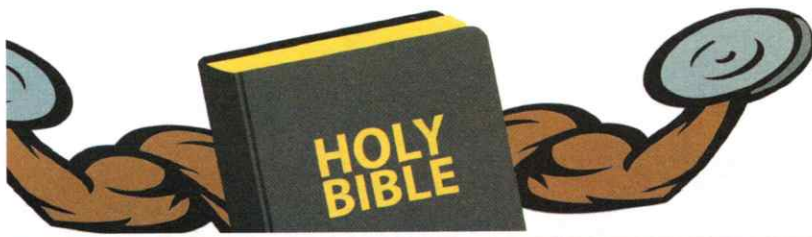
Exodus 23:1-12

1 “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. 2 Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, 3 and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit. 4 If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it. 6 Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. 7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. 8 Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. 9 Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. 10 For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, 11 but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. 12 Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.”



KEY VERSES:

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.” (Exodus 23:2-3)



WORK OUT

TODAY'S BIBLICAL TEXT STARTS WITH A LIST OF "DO NOTS" AS GOD CALLS FOR ALL OF US TO BE IMPARTIAL IN SHOWING JUSTICE AND MERCY. The first "do not" in the list is that we are not to spread false reports. Christians are not to pervert justice with misleading testimony to help a guilty person. Verse 2 speaks about following the crowd. Falling prey to the "mob mentality" is often a path that leads to a world of destruction. When it comes to favoritism in carrying out justice, verse 3 states that we are not to corrupt justice in the favor of the poor simply because they are poor. Only factors of right and wrong should weigh on verdicts. The scales of justice symbolize the equity in which justice is to be executed for all people. This extends to everyday life as well. We are to be kind and friendly, even to our enemies. If we see an enemy in need, we should assist the person. It is just the right thing to do. Verse 6 states that we should not take advantage of the poor by denying them justice because they are not able to help us in return. We are also warned not to accept gifts from others if they are trying to bribe us to lie. Verses 10-12 remind us how important it is to observe times of rest. God spoke through Moses and commanded the people to work their land for six years, and to let the land rest in the seventh year. Anything the land produced naturally in the seventh year was for the poor to reap for themselves. The Israelites were also commanded to work six days and celebrate the seventh day as a day of rest.

INSIDE OUT



To work for six days and rest on the seventh is a command going back to Genesis 2:2-3. God worked for six days during the Creation—bringing order out of chaos—and rested on the seventh day. The Ten Commandments include the fourth commandment: remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Today, God's people have the obligation to work, so we also must take opportunities to rest. These times of rest are important for caring for ourselves. During that rest, we can spend time in activities (including doing absolutely nothing) that refresh both the mind and body.

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

The class will work in groups to write a song about justice that challenges others to work to bring justice in unjust situations. Each group will be responsible for a verse of the song. Use a separate sheet of paper to record your ideas.



Verse 1 cautions against spreading lies and lying to help a guilty person. You cannot stop people from spreading lies, but you do not have to be the person doing it. Spreading lies includes backstabbing or smearing a person's character. While it is tempting to some, Christian youths are commanded not to participate in these activities.