

THE COVENANT CODE: JUSTICE, LAND AND SABBATH

EXODUS 23:1-13

The next set of commands deal with social relationships and the necessity for honesty and fairness between the citizens of the community. The Israelites were to be God's people set apart from all other people groups; diversity was not allowed. The only way a non-Jew was allowed into the community on an equal, permanent basis was to become a proselyte to Judaism. Foreigners could live among them and they were to be treated well, but they weren't part of the covenant community. Further, the community couldn't remain cohesive if the people were not dealing fairly and honestly with one another. The Israelites were supposed to be a people who showed the rest of the world what it looked like to serve and represent the one true God; dishonesty and discord within the community would defeat the purpose for which they had been created as a people.

The next command deals with honesty and justice. It is impossible to have a harmonious community of people who do not trust one another and dishonesty breeds mistrust. Whether it is in a court of law or in business dealings or in the context of human relationships, honesty is a vital component of a cohesive, orderly community.

Exodus 23:1 ¹“You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked [רָשָׁע] man to be a malicious [תְּמָרָס] witness [עֵד].

Joining together with a wicked man is not something the Israelites were supposed to do in any case, but this command is referring to joining with such a person in order to be a false witness against another person or to spread lies about another. Wicked, רָשָׁע, is a strong word referring to someone who is wicked, guilty, in the wrong, a criminal or a transgressor; it is the opposite of righteous. It pertains to evil with a focus on the guilt of violating a standard, in this case, it is primarily about lying in a courtroom type of proceeding in order to bring about an incorrect judgment. This is a sin not only against other people but against God and to engage in this behavior is to become an enemy of God. This is an amplification of the ninth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). The Israelites were not to enter into alliances with wicked men in any case, but the context here refers to a conspiracy to lie and deceive an arbiter in order to bring about an unjust result.

Malicious, רָמָה, means to do violence, to do wrong implying cruelty, damage, and to bring about an injustice that is a particularly grievous or serious affront to true justice. This is something deliberately done to someone else with malice aforethought meant to do harm to another person whether it is to their reputation in a courtroom or to bring about an injustice in some matter under legal consideration. This kind of thing can unjustly turn people against others for what is a lie and create divisions within the community. Lying can result in injustice in terms of legal proceedings whether an innocent person is unjustly convicted or a guilty person is declared innocent. Some commentators believe this

Scripture is a blanket condemnation of all lying but it seems to be primarily concerned with a judicial context. The use of the word “witness,” עֵד, implies a judicial context that is the primary context of this Scripture, although it is certainly true concerning interpersonal relations with others outside of the judicial process.

The Law required at least two witnesses to convict someone of a crime. Joining with a wicked person in order to bring about an unjust verdict was especially egregious; it defeated God's purpose for requiring two witnesses. Two or more witnesses were required to insure a just, honest verdict, but if those witnesses entered into a malicious pact to lie and discredit another person's case, God's purpose for insuring justice was perverted and defeated.

The next prohibition concerns following the crowd when they are engaged in doing evil.

Exodus 23:2 ²“You shall not follow the masses [רב] in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude [רב] in order to pervert [נָטָה] justice”

Masses and multitude are both the same word, רב, usually translated in this context as a large number of people, but it can also mean much or mighty. In this context, a large group of people intent on doing evil or perverting justice must not be joined for those purposes. Most of the more recent English translations use the same word in both instances. The ASV and the RSV translate it “multitude” and the HCSB and the NET Bible translate it “crowd.” The TANAKH translates it “mighty.” I found only one lexicon that suggested it means “mighty,” but I will defer to the Jews who translated the TANAKH assuming they know the He-

brew carries that meaning. The implication is that crowds, simply by virtue of being a large group of people, have a power base that arises out of sheer numbers. My assumption is the NASB translators used two different words simply for variety in terms of reading the text, but that is confusing because it is the same word and that is not apparent in English.

Pervert, *נָטָה*, is used in a figurative sense in this verse meaning to turn from righteousness and justice. The Israelites were commanded to think for themselves and not participate in groups bent on doing evil. Crowd or mob psychology has been and still is an easily observable phenomenon in human behavior. Crowds are easily manipulated into a mindless frenzy by a few people and can commit tremendous acts of lawlessness most of them would never commit if acting alone. In large crowds, people seem to lose their individuality and their ability to independently think and reason allowing themselves to be carried along by group think. It is all too easy to go along with something in order to avoid standing out from the rest of the crowd or take a chance on looking foolish to everyone else by refusing to engage in the mob's activity. People generally don't want to stand out by going against the majority even if the multitude is wrong and people in crowds are easily manipulated into going along and doing that which is evil. God knew that mindset would be part of man's sinful nature, and He warned the Israelites not to engage in mob activity. They were to think and conduct themselves as individuals according to the guidelines He gave them for life in Israel as His covenant community.

We have numerous examples of this behavior in our nation. Most urban riots are the result of mob psychology aided by agitators trying to overturn our society. In years past, there were instances of mobs attacking jails in order to enforce what they thought would be justice on a prisoner they were convinced was guilty of some offense. There is a reason why the term "lynch mob" is part of our vocabulary. That's what happened to Joseph Smith in Illinois. The French Revolution is often used as an example of mob psychology at work. I suspect a lot of the pogroms against European and Russian Jews started as mob actions as people were manipulated into violence against Jews by anti-Semitic tools of Satan.

No Israelite was to join the multitude and go along with the group as a means of perverting justice. People are entitled to the truth particularly when it comes to the serious issues of legal culpability or civil liability within the bounds of legal disputes. What is right and wrong cannot be accurately determined by the mob and it takes men of character to stand up to it. That's the example the Israelites were to set for the world.

The Israelites were not to show partiality to a poor person in their judicial proceedings.

Exodus 23:3 ³nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

This is a command to be fair to all people. Poor people were not to be given an unfair advantage in settling disputes simply because they were poor, and rich people were not to be punished contrary to the facts of the case simp-

ly because they were wealthy. Conversely, the rich were not to be favored over the poor which was often the case. This was amplified and made clear in Leviticus 19:15.

Leviticus 19:15 ¹⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.

In Israel, one's neighbor was any fellow Israelite as well as any other person who happened to be in the nation and subject to their judicial system.

The next command concerns the property of a person with whom one is at enmity.

Exodus 23:4–5 ⁴If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. ⁵If you see the donkey of one who hates [אִיֵּשׁ] you lying *helpless* under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release *it* with him.

This command is an element of the command to love your neighbor as yourself which the Lord said was one of the two greatest commandments. God didn't put any qualifiers on this command in terms friends and enemies. The Israelites were to help one another out when they needed it, friend and foe alike. This command was amplified by Christ Jesus in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

Leviticus 19:18 ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Matthew 22:36–40 ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’” ³⁸“This is the great and foremost com-

mandment. ³⁹“The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’
⁴⁰“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

This command isn't simply about an ox or a donkey; it is about caring for other people by caring for their property when the opportunity and the necessity arises. "... [P]ersonal antipathy, enmity, and hatred were not to lead them to injustice or churlish behavior."¹ This is talking about doing good to those who hate you which is a concept entirely contrary to the sin nature. Hate, שִׂנְאָה, is a strong word meaning to hate, abhor, detest, loathe, to be hostile; it refers to having a feeling of open hostility and intense dislike. This word is the opposite of love. The Israelites were to love one another and not hate each other.

This command was amplified in Deuteronomy to reveal it encompassed much more than an ox or a donkey.

Deuteronomy 22:1-4 ¹“You shall not see your countryman's ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. ²“If your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. ³“Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect *them*. ⁴“You shall not see your countryman's donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise *them* up.

The next command also deals with the perversion of justice.

Exodus 23:6-7 ⁶“You shall not pervert the justice *due* to your needy [אֶבְיֹוֹן] *brother* in his dispute. ⁷“Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.

¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (1866-1891; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 1:415.

This reiterates the command to be fair. A poor person must not be discriminated against and unjustly held to account for something contrary to the facts simply because he is poor and socially disadvantaged. He is to be afforded all the due process any Israelite should receive whether wealthy or not. Under the theocratic governance of God, no Israelite was superior to any other citizen and they were all to be treated that way.

One commentator, Cassuto, claims the word for needy, אֶבְיֹֹן, which means poor or needy, is actually a synonym for the words translated “enemy” in verse 4 and “one who hates” in verse 5, however, no lexical support exists for this and the TANAKH translates it “needy;” therefore, Cassuto's assertion seems to be incorrect.

The Israelites were not to make false charges against anyone else in their community. I'm assuming this applies to any situation that may come up in their society and not just judicial types of proceedings. It is serious business with real world consequences when false accusations are made against people. Those kinds of things can cost people their reputations, their livelihood, their marriages and families, and, if serious enough, their lives. If it is a true accusation, then those things are the possible consequences for committing a transgression, but if they are false, lives can be destroyed out of malicious motives. Bringing false charges can result in the innocent and the righteous forfeiting their lives. This can be the result of perverted justice within the judicial system or the result of extra

judicial mob action that was prohibited earlier. The only path to putting a person to death was through the honest and fair adjudication of the facts of the case.

Those who participate in unjustly bringing about the death of an innocent person may believe they got away with something, but there is a righteous Judge who will settle accounts in the end.

The next command prohibits bribes which obviously perverts justice and can lead to innocent death.

Exodus 23:8 ⁸"You shall not take a bribe [שֹׁחַד], for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.

Bribery is the epitome of injustice and the opposite of justice. God who is holy, righteous, and just cannot look upon anything other than justice with favor. Bribe, שֹׁחַד, means a bribe, a reward, or a gift. In this context, it is referring to a bribe. It suggests giving something to a person to act or think in a certain way in which that person would not normally act or think. It is a perversion of justice; only people who are in the wrong need to bribe someone to rule in their favor. Once a bribe is received, any semblance of fairness is removed from the judicial process.

God cannot be bribed and He expects those who are made in His image to refrain from taking them as well. Accepting a bribe means impartiality is gone.

Deuteronomy 10:17 ¹⁷"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.

The Old Testament mentions bribery quite a few times so it must have been a very serious problem among the nations during that time, and it was God's intention to show them what a nation serving Yahweh looked like and how superior it was to their abusive, perverted, and unjust judicial systems.

Bribery can have only one goal and that is to condemn the innocent. Presumably, the party in the right would have no need to bribe a judge assuming the proceedings were fairly and impartially conducted in the first place.

Isaiah 5:23 ²³Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

This became a problem in Israel and was part of the reason for the condemnation Israel and Judah were under that led to their destruction at the hands of Assyria and Babylon.

Ezekiel 22:2, 12 ²"And you, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Then cause her to know all her abominations.... ¹²"In you they have taken bribes to shed blood ...

Amos 5:12 ¹²For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, You who distress the righteous *and* accept bribes And turn aside the poor in the gate.

One commentator suggested this verse was referring to a gift as though there was no intent to influence the arbiter in the case. He believed that even though the judge would think he was being honest and fair, the gift would unduly and unfairly influence his decision making. This is not a tenable position to hold. Gift is a different word, *תָּתַן* meaning to give. People simply do not give "gifts" to other people with decision making authority in their disputes without

expecting something in return and no one accepts them without at least tacitly agreeing to decide in the “gift” giver's favor.

The command to treat the alien among them well was repeated and it was once again connected to the fact the Jews had been mistreated as aliens in the foreign culture of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9 ⁹“You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The next command is the first presentation of the seventh year Sabbath rest for the land. During this year, the farmers were not to actively farm their ground and tend their groves and vineyards. They were to allow them to produce on their own for that year and whatever was produced was for the poor to harvest. Whatever they left was for the animals.

Exodus 23:10–11 ¹⁰“You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, ¹¹but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow [שָׁמַר], so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.

Some theologians try to deny this can be literal truth because they think it would have been impossible for the Israelites to keep from starving to death if they cultivated no crops every seven years. “[F]armers were given freedom to decide how to rotate or stagger the resting of their crops among their various fields, groves, and vineyards. In that way farmers were still actively farming each

year, and roughly the same food volume would be produced every year throughout Israel."²

This, however, is a definite denial of the words of the Bible and a denial of the reality of the supernatural; therefore, it cannot be accurate. The Bible is very clear on this so how should we view it? We should view it according to how the Bible presents it. Understanding the situation concerning this Sabbath rest must be the fruit of understanding God's unique covenant relationship with Israel and His promises to bless them. He promised them blessings for obedience and part of those blessings included abundant rainfall in its season and the resulting agricultural productivity. This was not a promise beyond the capabilities of the God of creation. The fact is God promised to sustain them for the duration of that year. God also promised curses for disobedience and part of those curses would fall upon them for disregarding the seventh year Sabbath rest.

Fallow, *שָׁנָה*, means to forsake, reject, or abandon; it is to cause a relationship or association to cease until a possible renewal. That is a very good descriptive word for the concept of allowing the land to go unworked for a year and then work resumed for six more years. There is no ambiguity in the use of this word that would allow us to believe farming continued in any way during the seventh year.

The parallel command in Leviticus explains this situation a little bit more.

² Douglas K. Stuart, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 530-532.

Leviticus 25:2–7 ²“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the LORD. ³Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, ⁴but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. ⁵Your harvest’s aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. ⁶All of you shall have the sabbath *products* of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. ⁷Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat.

The blessing promises of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 addressed the issue of agricultural productivity, but they did not specifically connect that truth with the Sabbath rest of the land every seventh year. We will see, however, the curses revealed in those chapters did make that connection.

Leviticus 26:3–5, 10 ³If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, ⁴then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. ⁵Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land.... ¹⁰You will eat the old supply and clear out the old because of the new.

Deuteronomy 28:2, 4-5, 8, 11-12 ²“All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God: ... ⁴“Blessed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. ⁵“Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl.... ⁸“The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you.... ¹¹“The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. ¹²“The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand ...

If God promised to bless them for obedience, and then He allowed the people and their livestock to starve every seventh year, that wouldn't be much of a blessing. However, God promised them He would insure their productivity to continue during the fallow year so they could sustain themselves for that year and into the next until their crops began their normal productivity cycle in response to the renewal of normal farming practices. That promise is in Leviticus 25.

Leviticus 25:18–22 ¹⁸You shall thus observe My statutes and keep My judgments, so as to carry them out, that you may live securely on the land. ¹⁹Then the land will yield its produce, so that you can eat your fill and live securely on it. ²⁰But if you say, "What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?" ²¹then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. ²²When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating *the old* until the ninth year when its crop comes in.

It is unknown whether or not the Israelites ever obeyed the command to observe the seventh year Sabbath rest. Obedience to this command takes a big faith in Yahweh. It is not normal for people who are dependent on agricultural productivity to live to forgo farming every seventh year. We do know that it was eventually disregarded and one suspects they didn't really trust God to provide for them as He promised to do; therefore, it is reasonable to suspect they never did it. They may have exhibited the same doubt about God's provision during that year the theologian we read earlier expressed. We also know one of the primary reasons for the Babylonian exile was their failure to observe this Sabbath rest seventy times which encompassed 490 years. The captivity in

Babylon lasted seventy years which was one year for every missed year of Sabbath rest.

One of the curses for disobedience was for the failure to observe the seventh year Sabbath rest.

Leviticus 26:33–35 ³³You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. ³⁴Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. ³⁵All the days of *its* desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it.

2 Chronicles ends with the declaration the Babylonian captivity was to last for seventy years in order to make up for the missed Sabbath rests for the land. During the Babylonian captivity, Israel must have been unfarmed, or at least minimally farmed, because the land kept its sabbaths during the seventy years.

2 Chronicles 36:20–21 ²⁰Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

Once Israel returned from Babylon, they apparently began observing the land's Sabbath rest during the appropriate years.

Nehemiah 10:31 ³¹As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego *the crops the seventh year* and the exaction of every debt.

There are also extra-biblical sources that confirm the Israelites did observe this Sabbath observance after the return from Babylon.

The city of Bethzur was overcome by Antiochus IV because the food supply of the city was low due to the Sabbath observance and the citizens there knew they could not withstand a siege without adequate food. He also besieged Jerusalem and they quickly ran out of food supplies.

1 Maccabees 6:49, 53 ⁴⁹But with them that were in Bethsura he made peace: for they came out of the city, because they had no victuals there to endure the siege, it being a year of rest to the land.... ⁵³Yet at the last, their vessels being without victuals, (for that it was the seventh year, and they in Judea, that were delivered from the Gentiles, had eaten up the residue of the store;) [KJV].

Josephus recorded the fact the Jews also did not go to war during the seventh year Sabbath land rest. "And as the siege was delayed by this means, the year of rest came on, upon which the Jews rest every seventh year as they do on every seventh day. On this year, therefore, Ptolemy was freed from being besieged ..." ³ Josephus also recorded the fact that Caesar allowed the Jews to refrain from an offering during the Sabbath year because they did not farm their land in that year. "Caius Caesar, imperator the second time, hath ordained, That all the country of the Jews, excepting Joppa, do pay a tribute yearly for the city Jerusalem, excepting the seventh, which they call the Sabbatical Year, because thereon they neither receive the fruits of their trees, nor do they sow in their land; and that they pay their tribute to Sidon on the second year [of that Sabbatic period] ..." ⁴

The next command reiterated the weekly Sabbath ordinance. This refers back to the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11).

³ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1.2.4.

⁴ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 14, 10, 6.

Exodus 23:12 ¹²“Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.

We've already discussed this so we won't go back over it, except to say this day was set aside as a day of rest and not as a day of worship as so many Christians seem to suppose.

The next command reiterates the first commandment to “have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).

Exodus 23:13 ¹³“Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let *them* be heard from your mouth.

This command amplifies the First Commandment even further by prohibiting the mention of the very name of any false god. Not only were they not to worship them, they were not to speak of them and their names were not to be heard in Israel. Part of worshiping a god is calling on the name of that god in terms of worship and supplication; therefore, they were not to mention the name of any false god. The only God they were to call on was Yahweh and the Bible refers to that fact of calling on the name of Yahweh very early on in history.

Genesis 4:26 ²⁶To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then *men* began to call [קָרָא] upon the name of the LORD.

To call, קָרָא, has a wide range of meaning encompassing to call, to declare, to summon, to invite, to read, to be called, to be invoked, or to be named. In terms of calling on the Lord, it means to call upon Him or summon Him to one's cause and this generally concerns some sort of need the person has

that he thinks God can meet. For an Israelite to name a false god, suggested the pagan deity upon whom he was calling could assist him in his need. Not only is that untrue, it is an insult to the God who created them to be His covenant people and who brought them out of slavery. By prohibiting calling on the names of pagan deities, God was prohibiting the worship of those false gods.

Calling on the name of the Lord is an integral part of worshipping Him and there is no reason to suggest the pagans felt any differently about the worship of their false gods.

Genesis 12:8 ⁸Then he [Abram] proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

The Psalmist recorded the fact God is near to all who call on Him in truth.

Psalms 145:18 ¹⁸The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.

Moses later indicated the Israelites were the only people who had a God who could be called upon when needed the implication being there was never a need for them to utter any other name. He was contrasting the greatness of Yahweh who was always with them with the false gods of the pagans who could do nothing.

Deuteronomy 4:7 ⁷“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him?”

In the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, God's prophet suggested calling on the name of their respective gods, Baal or Yah-

weh, and see who answered and by answering identify themselves as the true God.

1 Kings 18:24 ²⁴“Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.”

The prophets of Baal called and called upon the name of their impotent god to no avail.

1 Kings 18:25–29 ²⁵So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire *under it*.” ²⁶Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. ²⁷It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.” ²⁸So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. ²⁹When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

God answered when Elijah called upon Him to hear his prayer and identify Himself as the one true God.

1 Kings 18:36–39 ³⁶At the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷“Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and *that* You have turned their heart back again.” ³⁸Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.”

Calling on the name of God is a significant act and the Israelites were never to utter the names of the pagan gods which acknowledged them and gave them recognition they did not deserve.