



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Re'eh (ראה, "See!")**
- **Chapters: Deut. 11:26-16:17**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Parashat Re'eh begins with a dramatic appeal to choose to obey the commandments of the LORD: "See, I set before you blessing and curse" - a blessing if you follow God's ways, but a curse if you turn to idolatry and forsake the way of the LORD. In either case, each individual is responsible to make their own choice. A formal ceremony would later be held on the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal immediately after entering the promised land where the consequences of the blessing and the curse would be pronounced.

Moses then continued his speech, further explaining the laws the people must observe. First of all they must entirely destroy the worship shrines of the inhabitants of the land, burning all idols and tearing down all altars of sacrifices in the "high places." Next, after the people settled the land, they were to establish a permanent worship site dedicated to the LORD. Sacrifices were to be brought only to God's chosen place, though, kosher animals may be slaughtered and eaten in their new settlements, provided none of its blood was consumed.

Moses warned the people to be wary of false prophets who might attempt to entice them into worshipping other gods. Someone guilty of seducing the people to engage in idolatry was to be executed – even if they were a family member. Likewise, a settlement that later embraced idolatry must be entirely destroyed just as the Canaanite settlements were destroyed. The people were warned not to worship the LORD as they saw fit, but only as directed by the law. Self-inflicted wounds on the body or head as a sign of mourning was prohibited.

The laws of kashrut – the identifying signs for kosher animals, fish, and birds – was repeated. Moses then provided instructions about tithing. Every year a tenth of a farmer's produce was to be given to the Levite, and additional tithes were to be brought to the permanent worship site in the land. On certain years the additional tithe was to be given to the poor instead. All firstborn cattle and sheep were to be offered to the priests.

The people were to regularly practice charity so that no one was made destitute in the land. Israel was to observe a "Sabbatical Year" every seventh year, where the land was to remain fallow, all debts were to be canceled, and Jewish indentured servants were to be set free. The portion concludes with Moses explaining the observance of the three "pilgrimage festivals," namely, Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot, when all the men were required to appear before the LORD.



Parashah Questions



1. What does the word *re'eh* (ראה) mean (Deut. 11:26)?¹
2. How do we obtain God's blessing (Deut. 11:27)?²
3. How to we obtain God's curse (Deut. 11:28)?³
4. Whose choice is it to be blessed or to be cursed (Deut. 11:26)?⁴
5. If obedience leads to blessing, why do the wicked sometimes prosper?⁵
6. Does personal righteousness come from "luck"?⁶
7. Where were the actual blessings and curses recited (Deut. 11:29-30)?⁷
8. Where were the Israelites to begin their incursion into the land (Deut. 11:31)?⁸
9. Were the laws only to be observed in the promised land (Deut. 12:1)?⁹

¹ *Re'eh* (ראה) is an imperative verb meaning "See!" Note that the verb is *singular* ("you see!") whereas the following pronoun is *plural* ("before you today"). Although Torah is freely given to all "who have ears to hear," it's our own *personal* responsibility to "choose life" and walk its message out in our lives.

² We obtain God's blessing (*berakhah*) when we obey Him. The very act of obedience is a blessing. Note that the object marker *et* (אֶת) before the word "blessing" alludes to the list of blessings from "Aleph to Tav" given in Lev. 26:3-13.

³ We obtain God's curse when we disobey Him. Neglecting God's truth invariably leads to idolatry – self exaltation. Note that the word for curse (*kalal*) means to be treated as of little account, and therefore being cursed essentially mirrors the rebellious heart's attitude toward God.

⁴ The expression "before you" implies that people have choice and free will (see Deut. 30:19 – "choose life!"). Belief in free will coheres with the revelation of God's righteousness, since punishment is fitting only when a person has a real choice between right and wrong. As Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:25). Likewise the idea of reward is meaningless if God simply decreed who was to be saintly and who was not. The assumption of moral determination is also implied in the imperative language of Scripture – "ought implies can."

⁵ The choice to live in godliness was not intended to be trivial or obvious. In this life, the wicked may prosper while the righteous may suffer, but this is in order to test the righteous to see whether they will obey (Deut. 8:16). The Torah states, however, that if you obey, there is only blessing, whereas if you disobey, there is only curse, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. For the righteous: *Gam Zu L'Tovah* (Rom. 8:28).

⁶ No. Deciding between a life of righteousness and a life of evil-doing is a matter of personal choice and responsibility, though David said, "God supports my lot" (Psalm 16:5) and our steps are "ordered" by the LORD (Prov. 16:9).

⁷ The blessing would be recited on Mount Gerizim ("cutting off," a picture of circumcision) and the curse would be recited on Mount Ebal ("stone" or "bare mountain"). These were located near ancient Shechem by the "oak of Mamre," where Abraham first built an altar to the LORD (Gen. 13:18). Note that Gilgal ("rolled off") was the place of the first camp of the Israelites, and the reaffirmation of the covenant was the basis of and prelude for the settlement of the land. The sages say that Moses provided "directions" to this location because after the death of Aaron the Cloud of Glory that led the people disappeared (this is allude to from the last letters of the first words of verse 11:30, i.e., הַיְיָ הֵאֱלֹהֵינוּ בְעֵבֶר הַיְיָ הֵאֱלֹהֵינוּ, which spell the name "Aaron").

⁸ Across the Jordan River, which was miraculously split in two (see Joshua chapter 3).

⁹ No. The commandments for the land (e.g., agricultural laws) were tied to the physical land, but the other laws were to be carried out everywhere and in every place: "as long as you live on earth."



10. What was required of the people before a place for the sanctuary could be established in the land (12:2-3)?¹⁰
11. What were “Asherah poles” (Deut. 12:3)?¹¹
12. From Deut. 12:4, what Jewish law was developed?¹²
13. What does “the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name” refer (Deut. 12:5)?¹³
14. Who were the Jebusites?¹⁴
15. Why did God want a centralized place for offering sacrifices (Deut. 12:6-7)?¹⁵
16. Why did Moses say that the people “did whatever was right in his own eyes” (Deut. 12:8-11)?¹⁶
17. Briefly provide the history of the Tabernacle (Mishkan).¹⁷
18. Why was meat slaughtered for personal consumption compared to the laws of “the gazelle and the deer” (Deut. 12:15)?¹⁸

¹⁰ The people first had to destroy all the pagan shrines and altars in the land to purify it from defilement.

¹¹ These were poles that stood near Canaanite religious shrines to honor the fertility goddess “Asherah,” the wife of El (god). Perhaps similar to the Greek idea of “mother earth” (Gaea) and “father time” (or the sky god). The prophet Jeremiah refers to Asherah as the “queen of heaven.”

¹² The previous commandment (12:3) focused on “blotting out” all traces of idolatry, which is contrasted with the commandment to establish God’s sanctuary in the land. From this, the sages inferred that we should never efface or erase one of the seven Names of God (YHVH, Adonai, El, Eloha, Elohim, Shaddai, or Tzeva’ot). The only exception is in the case of the *sotah* (suspected woman), and this ritual is considered so unusual as to reinforce the idea that the Name of God should never be willingly erased. This led to the rabbinical law that anything with one of the seven Names written upon it must never be destroyed but rather stored in a genizah.

¹³ This is the central location for the Tabernacle (later established by David in the territory of Benjamin: 2 Sam. 24:8).

¹⁴ A Canaanite tribe (Gen. 10:15-17) who inhabited and built Jerusalem prior to its conquest by King David. If Shalem is the same as Jebus, then Melchizedek was once the King of this region.

¹⁵ To prevent lawlessness, idolatry, and occultic religion to supplant the laws of sacrifice given in the Torah. The offerings were meant for celebrations for the LORD’s blessing and provision. Note that “tithes” refers to both animal tithes (Lev. 27:32) as well as ma’aser sheni from the land. “Offerings” refers to bikkurim, first fruits. The law of sacrificing only at the Tabernacle is repeated in Deut. 12:13-14.

¹⁶ This was meant for contrast. After the people settled the land, worship was to become uniform, with required sacrifices at the place where the Lord would put His Name.

¹⁷ It was built in the desert per instructions given at Sinai and remained with the people during the 40 year exile. Joshua brought it to Gilgal, where it stayed for 14 years. Later it was moved to Shiloh where it remained for 369 years. With the death of Eli the High Priest, the Philistines captured the Ark and the Tabernacle was destroyed. It was rebuilt at Nov, where it remained for 13 years, and later it was moved to Giv’on where it remained 44 years until David took it to Jerusalem. The prophet Gad later revealed that Mount Moriah was the place God chose for the Temple.

¹⁸ The gazelle and the deer were undomesticated animals that were permitted for food, but not for sacrifice. These animals must be ritually slaughtered and none of their blood could be consumed. The status of kosher animals slaughtered for food would be “as the gazelle and the deer,” that is, *not* to be regarded in religious terms. Note that this commandment is repeated in Deut. 12:20-27.



19. Where were offerings designated as “tithes” to be eaten (Deut. 12:17-18)? ¹⁹
20. Why did Moses warn the people not to neglect the Levites (Deut. 12:19)? ²⁰
21. What does “shechitah” mean? ²¹
22. Why was blood forbidden to be consumed (Deut. 12:23-24)? ²²
23. Why does Moses warn the people not to enquire about the religious practices of the seven Canaanite nations (Deut. 12:29-13:1)? ²³
24. What is the “meta-mitzvah” of the Torah of Moses (Deut. 12:32)? ²⁴
25. Why does God permit “false prophets” to arise (Deut. 13:2-4)? ²⁵
26. Why was Elijah not charged with being a false prophet, even though he offered sacrifices to God on Mount Carmel instead of at the Tabernacle? ²⁶
27. Are the rabbis who put a “fence” around the Torah guilty of adding to the commandments? ²⁷
28. What is to be done with a false prophet who speaks in the Name of the LORD? ²⁸
29. Can a true prophet speak an untruth? ²⁹

¹⁹ Tithes designated as offerings must be eaten before the LORD at the Tabernacle along with family members, servants, and the Levites. Note the requirement to be “happy” before the LORD in this matter.

²⁰ The Levites were not given land inheritances and they were in constant duty to serve at the Tabernacle. God scattered them throughout the tribes to teach the Israelites the Torah. As Torah scholars, they needed the people’s support.

²¹ Ritual slaughter according to Jewish oral law. A “shochet” is a religiously trained butcher.

²² The blood of an animal is its life (nefesh) which was reserved for atonement rituals at the altar (Lev. 17:11). The penalty for eating blood was *karat* – being “cut off” or having your own life shortened.

²³ For two reasons. First, because their practices, including offering child sacrifice, was hateful to God, and second, because God had clearly prescribed the way to worship Him by means of the Tabernacle and its rituals, and these were not to be commingled with pagan ideology of any kind. In addition, it was forbidden to worship idols using any of the ways the LORD was to be worshipped.

²⁴ It is forbidden to add commandments or to subtract commandments from those revealed to Moses from the LORD. This is a “meta” commandment because it affects all other commandments of the Torah.

²⁵ A false prophet is one who obtains certain powers of prophecy through impure means, such as Balaam, son of Peor. God allows false prophets to arise to test Israel’s loyalty and to see whether they really love Him with all their hearts.

²⁶ Elijah was an attested prophet of God who temporarily suspended the law for the sake of the sanctification of the Name before the priests of Baal.

²⁷ Jewish tradition claims they were not creating new commandments, but enacting “ordinances” intended to prevent violations of the original commandments. Yeshua had a problem with this (Matt. 15:3-6; Mark 7:9-13).

²⁸ He is to be put to death. See Jeremiah 28:1-16 for the case of one Hananiah ben Azzur.

²⁹ According to Jewish tradition, if any detail of a favorable prophecy does not come to pass, the prophet is not a true prophet; however, if a negative prophecy does not come true, he may still be a true messenger, since God might have decided to spare those who were to be punished, as was the case of the Ninevites and the prophecy of Jonah.



30. What was the fate of someone who deliberately attempted to persuade an individual (or a group of individuals) to accept idolatry (Deut. 13:7-12)?³⁰
31. What was to be done with a settlement given over to idolatry (Deut. 13:13-19)?³¹
32. What is perhaps the worst sin you can commit (Deut. 14:1)?³²
33. Why were excessive mourning practices forbidden (Deut. 14:1-2)?³³
34. Why did God choose Israel (Deut. 14:2)?³⁴
35. What are the two marks of a kosher mammal (Deut. 14:3-8)?³⁵
36. What are the two marks of a kosher fish (Deut. 14:9-10)?³⁶
37. What is a main characteristic of unclean birds (Deut. 14:11-18)?³⁷
38. May winged insects be eaten (Deut. 14:19)?³⁸
39. Can you eat the meat of an animal that has died a natural death (Deut. 14:21)?³⁹
40. How much of a tithe is required to be given to the Levites (Deut. 14:22)?⁴⁰
41. When is it kosher to *test* the LORD?⁴¹

³⁰ He was to be executed by stoning. The first to cast the stone should be the one who was attempted to forsake the LORD. This should be a sober warning to all those who impugn the importance of God's revealed truth...

³¹ After thoroughly investigating the matter and it is established that a [majority population of] a city have turned away from the LORD to embrace idolatry, all of its inhabitants must be killed by the sword, and the entire city along with all its goods must be consumed in fire. The city itself must never be rebuilt. It is called *ir ha-nidachat*, a city condemned for idolatry. This was the same fate destined for the Canaanite cities devoted to idolatry.

³² One of the greatest sins is to forget who you really are -- a prince or princess of God (Deut. 14:1). Forgetting who you are leads to forgetting who the LORD is, just as forgetting who the LORD is leads to forgetting who you are.

³³ Since the people are "children of the LORD your God," they were forbidden to mourn like pagan nations who had no hope of the immortality of the soul. In particular, self-destructive forms of mourning are forbidden.

³⁴ Israel was chosen to be "am segulah," a treasured people, to praise the One who delivered them from slavery.

³⁵ A kosher mammal is one that has hooves divided into two parts and that chews the cud (i.e., they must swallow their food, bring it up, and chew it again).

³⁶ A kosher fish must have both scales and fins.

³⁷ They are raptorial or predatory. The Torah lists 24 species of non-kosher birds.

³⁸ No. Only insects that "leap" are regarded as kosher, such as grasshoppers and locusts.

³⁹ No. Only ritually slaughtered (live) kosher animals that are designated as "clean" may be eaten.

⁴⁰ A tenth part. Note, however, that after harvesting, 1/50th of the yield is separated for the kohen as *terumah*. After this, a tenth is given to the Levite. This is called *ma'aser rishon*, "the first tithe." Besides this, *another* tenth is separated to be eaten at the Mishkan during celebrations. This is called *ma'aser sheni*, "the second tithe." Note that during the 3rd and 6th years of the Shemittah cycle, the second tithe is given to the poor among us (Deut. 14:28). This is called *ma'aser ani*, "poor tithe." Finally, on the Shemittah year (7th year of the cycle), none of the tithing laws are applied. This implies that we should donate 1/5 of our resources to fulfill the mitzvah of charity. Note that money is also acceptable form of tithing (called *ma'aser kesafim*).

⁴¹ Although we are forbidden to test the Lord our God (Deut. 6:16), we are permitted to do so regarding tithing: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse .. and put me to the test, says the LORD of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour out for you blessing immeasurable" (Mal. 3:10). "Tzedakah saves from death" (Prov. 10:4).



42. What food increases one's fear of the LORD? ⁴²
43. What is the Sabbatical Year? ⁴³
44. How do you determine the Sabbatical year? ⁴⁴
45. What three things were to happen during the Sabbatical Year (Deut. 15:1-3)? ⁴⁵
46. What was the purpose for the Sabbatical Year (Deut. 15:4-6)? ⁴⁶
47. What happened if Shemittah was not observed as God commanded? ⁴⁷
48. What is our responsibility to a needy kinsman (Deut. 15:7-11)? ⁴⁸
49. What is the connection between idolatry and the refusal to give charity? ⁴⁹
50. Why must there always be poor in the land (Deut. 15:11)? ⁵⁰
51. What was the maximum period of indentured servitude (Deut. 15:12-18)? ⁵¹
52. What was to be done with all male firstborn of the flocks (Deut. 15:19-22)? ⁵²
53. When is the month of Aviv (Deut. 16:1)? ⁵³

⁴² Food given as ma'aser (tithes) increases the fear of the LORD.

⁴³ In the agricultural cycle of years, the seventh year is a "Sabbatical for the land," called Shemittah, "release."

⁴⁴ Take the current Jewish year and divide by seven; if there is no remainder, it is a Sabbatical year; otherwise it is not. Note that the date for the new Jewish year is Rosh Hashanah, on Tishri 1 (in the fall).

⁴⁵ The land was to remain fallow, all debts were to be canceled (at the end of the Sabbatical year), and Jewish indentured servants were to be set free.

⁴⁶ To eliminate poverty and oppression in the land, and to teach everyone to depend entirely upon God for life.

⁴⁷ Crops would not yield as much and the people would eventually be exiled from the land (2 Chron. 36:21). The 70 years of Babylonian captivity were punishment for the 70 shemittot Israel failed to keep from the time they entered the land to the destruction of the first Temple (i.e., 490 years). During the captivity God caused the land to receive its appropriate rest by remaining desolate for 70 years.

⁴⁸ We must not "harden our heart" and "close our hand" against our brother. Instead *patoach tiftach* (פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח) – you shall *surely* open your hand and lend to him whatever he might need. This idea is amplified in the following verse that reads, *naton titten lo* (נָתַתָּן לוֹ) – you shall readily give to him!

⁴⁹ One who will not help the poor denies that God has given him his substance, and therefore believes that whatever wealth he has belongs to him alone.

⁵⁰ The wealthy are tested in their willingness to help the less fortunate, while the poor are tested regarding their faith in God's provision for them (Midrash Rabbah). See Yeshua's comment in Matt. 26:11.

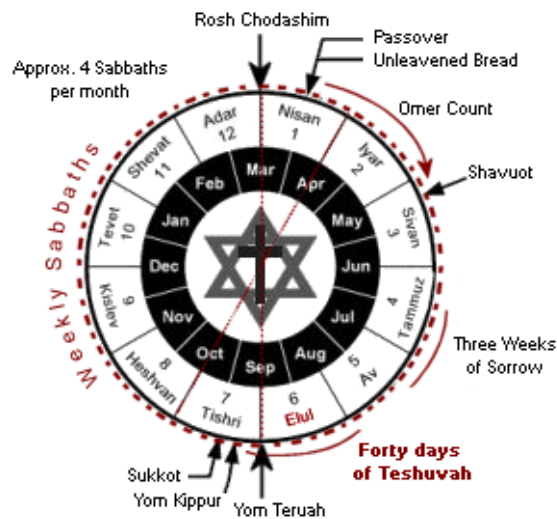
⁵¹ A Hebrew who became an indentured servant could serve for six years but was set free in the seventh. The servant was sent out with "severance gifts." This rule was adopted because of Israel's servitude in Egypt.

⁵² They were to be "consecrated" by being given to the priests (Deut. 12:17). Note these must be defect-free animals, and if not, they could be slaughtered and eaten "as the gazelle and the deer" (i.e., for personal consumption).

⁵³ The word aviv means "barley," and designates the first month of spring, the month of Passover. Aviv was later called Nisan (Neh. 2:1; Esther 3:7), and corresponds to March-April in the Gregorian calendar. The Sanhedrin was responsible for making sure Passover occurred in the spring and sometimes added an additional month to the calendar to offset the shift between the lunar and solar calendars.



54. What is the date of Passover (Deut. 16:1)? ⁵⁴
55. Where and when was the Passover lamb to be sacrificed (Deut. 16:2)? ⁵⁵
56. What is the feast of “unleavened bread” (Deut. 16:3-4)? ⁵⁶
57. What is the “omer count” (Deut. 16:9)? ⁵⁷
58. What is the “feast of weeks” (Deut. 16:10)? ⁵⁸
59. What is the “feast of booths” (Deut. 16:13-15)? ⁵⁹
60. What holidays are we commanded to rejoice and express joy? ⁶⁰
61. What are the three required “pilgrimage” festivals (Deut. 16:16-17)? ⁶¹
62. What do you get more of when you give it to others? ⁶²



⁵⁴ The seder begins at Nisan 14th at twilight and continues through the night of Nisan 15: “for it was the month of Aviv, at night, that the LORD your God freed you.” See Numbers 28:16-17.

⁵⁵ The korban Pesach, the Passover Sacrifice, was to be offered in the evening of Nisan 14, before sundown, and only at the Tabernacle, the public altar “where the LORD will choose to establish His Name.” See Deut. 16:5-6.

⁵⁶ A seven day feast that begins on Nisan 15 (Passover) when all chametz (yeast) is removed and only the “bread of distress” (matzah) may be eaten during the six days following Passover (see Deut. 16:7-8).

⁵⁷ A 49 day (seven weeks of days) countdown that commemorates the 50 days that passed between their redemption from Egypt and the time Israel received the Torah at Sinai. The Omer Offering is presented each day for 49 days, beginning on the second day of Passover (i.e., the day following the seder night) until the 50th day (“Pentecost”).

⁵⁸ The festival of Shavuot (“Weeks,” “Pentecost”) occurs exactly 49 days after the start of the omer count to commemorate the giving of the Torah to Israel (and the Holy Spirit to the followers of Yeshua: Acts 1:8,2:2).

⁵⁹ The festival of Sukkot (“tabernacles” or “booths”) is a seven day holiday that commemorates the 40 year journey through the desert. During this time, the people were to live in “booths” and to rejoice in God’s provision and care.

⁶⁰ We are commanded to be joyful during Shavuot and Sukkot (though many other holidays are joyful as well).

⁶¹ Attendance was required for the three festivals of Passover (Unleavened Bread), Shavuot, and Sukkot. Each person was required to present an offering “according to their means” based on God’s blessing.

⁶² The more money you give away to charity, the more you get back, since doing so honors God’s heart toward others.



Discussion Topics

1. Our Torah portion begins, “See, I give before you today a blessing and a curse” (Deut. 11:26), which is often identified as the basis for the Jewish understanding of free will. Belief in free will coheres with the revelation of God’s righteousness, since punishment is fitting only when a person has a genuine choice between doing right and wrong. As Abraham said, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25). Likewise the idea of reward is meaningless if God simply decreed who was to be saintly and who was not. Indeed, the validity of moral choice is implied in the imperatives found in Scripture – “ought implies can.”

Free will is paradoxical in light of God’s sovereignty, of course, though the paradox itself is no reason to negate its truth. Most people want to choose either horn of this dilemma (e.g., consider the Calvinism/Arminianism theological controversy), but the truth is that salvation is both about God’s sovereignty and your responsibility: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13). *Discuss.*
2. The Hebrew word for seeing (ראה) and the word for fearing (ירא) share the same root. This implies that we cannot genuinely “choose life” apart from personally *seeing* it, but we cannot see it apart from the *reverence* of God. The reverence of God sanctifies our perception and enables us to see clearly. Therefore the righteous “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). *Discuss.*
3. Those who are in relationship with the LORD through Yeshua are given the Holy Spirit in the role of Comforter (παρακλητος), who gives us strength to persevere in the midst of the storms of this life (John 14:26; 15:26). Nonetheless, the central commandment remains: We must *continually* choose to trust in God’s love and grace for our lives, every step of the way. God will never leave you nor forsake you, but He continues to say to those who trust in Him: “Behold, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). *Discuss.*
4. Discuss the importance of observing the Biblical holidays in your life. Do you conscientiously celebrate the festivals? Why or why not?
5. It has been said that the only thing we can “take with us” when we die is what we have freely given away to others... Discuss how the laws of tithing apply to us today.

For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Shoftim** (Deut. 16:18-21:9)
- Read the Haftarah (Isaiah 51:12-52:12)
- Read the New Testament (John 1:19-27; Acts 3:22-23)

