

EXODUS: The Person, Promise, and Power of God
Exodus 21, 22, and 23 – The Law and Life

INTRODUCTION

This section of the Bible is referred to as “the Book of the Covenant.” (Ex. 24:7) Whether or not we find it interesting, the Book of the Covenant is important. Paul says, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Rom.15:4) The Book of the Covenant was inspired by God just like the Ten Commandments and the rest of Scripture.

Two Reminders: First, we need to recognize these laws were given to people at a different _____ in a different _____. Second, the law of Moses was given to people at a different stage in the _____.

How should Christians today relate to the law of Moses?

1. *The law points to _____*

The Law of Moses may no longer define God’s will for us, but it does point to God’s will. The Law of Moses expressed God’s will to a specific people in a specific context at a specific moment. Those conditions no longer apply. Nevertheless, the Law of Moses did express something of God’s eternal will. Jesus said there are really only two commands: love God and love your neighbor (Mark 12:28–34). The only law we’re bound to today is the law of love.

2. *The law points to _____*

Romans 3:20–22 says: “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction.” The law is not given as a means of redemption. God has already redeemed his people. The law points in two ways to the Savior whom God sent to make his people righteous: *Our _____ is exposed* (Rom. 3:20); *Christ’s _____ is promised.* (Rom. 3:21)

These pointers to what Jesus *would do* became obsolete when Jesus came because the picture gave way to the reality. We no longer have to obey these laws, because they’ve been fulfilled in Jesus. But neither do we ditch them, because they help us understand what Jesus has accomplished.

3. *Jesus _____ the law*

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). The big question this raises is: *What does it actually mean for Jesus to fulfill the law?!* First, Jesus fulfills the law by embodying love for God and love for others (the law as wisdom). Second, Jesus fulfills the law by bringing its promises to fulfillment (the law as prophecy).

OLD COVENANT VERSUS NEW COVENANT

We live under what Jesus calls “the new covenant.” (Luke 22:20) The old covenant gave way to the new covenant when Jesus was sacrificed. Augustine of Hippo, the fourth-century African theologian, highlighted the link between these two covenants (Sinai and Pentecost). Both covenants took place _____ after the Passover. Both involved _____. Both involved _____. Both involved God _____ his _____. The difference is that the fire at Pentecost was _____ and _____.

In the old covenant, the law of Moses was written on _____. In the new covenant, the law of the Spirit is written on _____ (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:7–13). The great symbol of membership of the old covenant law of Moses was _____. But now, Paul says, “circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. (Rom. 2:29)

This means, in short, that _____. So, as you read extracts from the Law of Moses, the following questions will help apply it to you as a follower of Jesus Christ today:

1. How does this law express love for God or love for neighbor? How might the same principles be expressed today?
2. How does this law expose my sinfulness and need?
3. How did Jesus perfectly keep this law or the principles it embodies?
4. Does this law picture his work of salvation in some way?

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

The Book of the Covenant is an _____ of the Ten Commandments to the specific social context of Israel as a nation. Whereas the Ten Commandments were expressed as universal absolutes, the laws in the Book of the Covenant dealt with specific situations.

Concerning Slaves (EXODUS 21:1–11)

We should note first that this is not “slavery” like we think about in American history. Most people ran small family businesses, and their “slaves” were more like simple workers or employees in the business who lived at the master’s place. They were basically “contract workers.” Further, other variables made this situation different from American slavery. During the time of Moses, slavery was _____; was _____; was _____; was neither _____ nor _____; preserved the _____ of the _____.

Concerning Behavior (EXODUS 21:12–32)

This section includes laws on injuries to people and animals. The underlying principle is that the _____ should fit the _____.

Intentional and Unintentional Homicide Laws (21:12–14)

The first and third scenario (vv. 12, 14) deal with murder and the consequence: capital punishment; the middle scenario (v. 13) addresses an accidental homicide and the response to

it: protection of the guilty in a city of refuge. The middle scenario could be a case in which you accidentally ran over someone with a wagon, hit someone with a tool, or killed an ally in battle. This distinction made Israel different from other cultures of the day, which did not consider

_____.

The Sanctity of Life and the Image of God (21:12–17)

Many modern readers of the biblical laws have a hard time with capital punishment mentioned here in these chapters. The specific crimes calling for it include murder, kidnapping, physical or verbal assaults on one's parents, sorcery, bestiality, and idolatry (21:12–17; 22:18–20). But we must not forget what belief this action was based on: the value of _____, the honor of _____, and the purity of _____. Whatever you believe about the death penalty, at least grab this principle: people matter to God. They bear His image.

Assault on Parents, Kidnapping, and Cursing Parents (21:15–17)

These verses help to explain the meaning of “honor your father and mother.” The assault envisioned in verse 15 does not have a minor slap in view, but a serious attack—with the intent to kill, perhaps. Probably what is envisioned in verse 17 is not a one-time fit of rage that leads a child to disrespect their parents, but a total repudiation of their authority and failure to care for them. If a person stole another person and sold him, or if a person was in possession of a stolen person, then the death penalty was required (1 Tim 1:10). Kidnappers were to be put to death immediately.

Life-Threatening Injuries (21:18–21)

In verses 18–19 we see an example of a situation in which the judges would make their decisions regarding a fight. If a man got in a brawl with another man but the loser did not die, then the winner of the fight had to pay for the loss of time and see that the loser was healed. Again, we see the punishment fitting the crime. God did not say, “Put the man to death.” In verses 20–21 we see that the master did have the right to physically punish his slave, but he was not permitted to seriously injure or kill the slave. If he did, he could be tried as a murderer.

Permanent Injuries (21:22–27)

Verse 22 implies that there was a penalty for hitting a pregnant woman, even if she was not injured. The situation seems to be a case in which the lady was an innocent bystander of a fight and got struck in the process. The law considered both the mother and the child. Notice that the fetus was treated *as a person* (“life for life”). Verses 23–25 show that if someone was severely injured or killed, the punishment should fit the crime. Here we are introduced to the Bible's law of retaliation: “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” and so on. We should also keep in mind that, other than the case of the death penalty, the *law of retaliation* was not necessarily applied literally.

Jesus referred to the *law of retaliation* in Matthew 5:38–42, in which He said to “turn the other cheek.” But Jesus' point was different. These laws in Exodus provided guidelines for *judges* in assessing damages. Jesus' teaching was more about guidelines for *ordinary relationships*. Christians should seek to imitate God's own generosity and mercy in personal relationships, as

Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount. The heart of the Christian must be a heart of mercy, not retaliation (Eph 4:32).

Injuries Associated with Animals (21:28–32)

Because virtually everyone farmed in the ancient world, laws had to be put in place regarding animals. If it was written in our day, it might include laws related to automobiles. Moses explained that if the animal had a history of violence and the owner did not properly monitor it, and if the animal killed a person, then the owner was guilty of negligent homicide. If called for, a ransom could be paid. The same applied if the victim was a child. If the victim was a slave, it was different because of the social structure (v. 32).

Two things we learn from this passage:

1. I shouldn't blame someone if they accidentally harm me.
2. If I can anticipate an accident, then I should take steps to prevent it.

Concerning Restitution (EXODUS 21:33–22:15)

These laws show us what would happen if someone “got ripped off”—basic property laws. The offender was to make restitution. The required amount was related to the nature of the crime. The amount was normally multiples of the value of the loss. Offenders had to deal face to face with the offended; they had to generously compensate the victim.

How do these property laws relate to us? After encountering Christ, Zacchaeus said, “ ‘Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!’ ” (Luke 19:8). He wanted to give to those in need and return four-fold what he owed others. Why? Because the gospel changes us—it creates in us a new heart of love for God and neighbor. The gospel creates not just a heart to make things right with others that we have offended, but to go beyond—to lovingly serve and to generously give.

Concerning Holiness (EXODUS 22:16–20)

Verses 16–17 relate to premarital sex and to the seventh commandment. These verses show us two important concepts: the value of the lady (you could not run around and have sex with anyone without facing consequences) and the family's involvement in marriage.

God still calls His people to a life of holiness and purity. Now we have great power with the Holy Spirit to live out this calling (see 1 Cor 6:18–20; 1 Thess 4:3–5). In verses 18–20 Moses broadly surveyed capital crimes. God called Israel to be holy and worship Him alone; therefore, these rules carried the ultimate consequence. Each of the three cases mentioned made Israel unclean. Further, they involved the reasons God was about to judge the nations in Canaan (Lev 20:22–26).

Concerning Social Justice (EXODUS 22:21–23:9)

Compassion to the Foreigner, Widow, and Fatherless (22:21–24; 23:9)

The call to care for foreigners was rooted in this idea: “you were foreigners in the land of Egypt” (22:21; 23:9). God called Israel to show the same type of care they received from Him.

Compassion for the Poor (22:25–27)

Borrowing and lending are not forbidden in verse 25. God simply forbids exploiting the poor with exorbitant interest. Other verses in the Pentateuch show that God told His people not to charge excessive interest to any other Israelite, not just the poor (Deut 23:19–20). Once again, this was a command to show mercy and compassion. We are to imitate God by showing compassion to the poor. Jesus said, “Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Respect for God and Leaders (22:28)

One daily way that you live out a just life, with compassion and integrity, is by watching what you say about God and others, especially leaders. In the New Testament, Paul and Peter both echoed the call to respect those in leadership (Acts 23:5; Rom 13:1–7; 1 Tim 2:1–2; 1 Pet 3:13–17). Paul also spoke of the calling of Christians to respect those in leadership in the church as well (1 Thess 5:12–13).

Giving Offerings (22:29–30)

A love for God means that we give Him those things that belong to Him, including our gifts and offerings. Israelites may have been tempted to withhold these things, like people today, but such an act would not please God. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7).

Consecration (22:31)

This prohibition from eating flesh that was torn by beasts in the field probably was due to it being considered ritually unclean as well as it being unhealthy.

Do Not Pervert Justice (23:1–3, 6–8)

These laws expanded on the ninth commandment. They spoke against “following the crowd” if that meant you had to pervert justice.

Loving Enemies (23:4–5)

These verses show us that loving our neighbor includes our enemies. Instructions are given here for helping your neighbor, not just being civil. This makes us think of Jesus’ instruction to love those who hate you (Luke 6).

Concerning Sabbath and Festivals (EXODUS 23:10–19)

Concerning the Sabbath, the law said it should be a day in which all rest—including the animals, the slaves, and the foreigners (v. 12). Not only this, on the seventh year the people were also to rest from sowing and gathering so that the poor might benefit from the land (vv. 10–11). God then reminded the people to “Pay strict attention to everything I have said to you. You must not invoke the names of other gods; they must not be heard on your lips” (v. 13).

To commemorate what God had done, He established three feasts. First, the Festival of Unleavened Bread was established to celebrate Israel’s liberation (vv. 14–17). Second, the Festival of Harvest would celebrate God’s provision for His people. Third, the Festival of

Ingathering, which is also the Festival of Booths or the Festival of Tabernacles, would celebrate God's salvation. These feasts point us to God's salvation. They ultimately point us to Christ.

APPLICATION: WE NEED A SAVIOR!

If these laws demonstrate ways in which Israel was to live out the Ten Commandments, then the application is this. They couldn't do it. We cannot keep God's law. We need a Savior. Thankfully, there is One who lived the life we could not live and died the death we should have died. Jesus obeyed for us and died in place of lawbreakers. Because Jesus saves sinners and gives us His Spirit, we can now glorify Him in our ordinary, daily lives in each of these seven ways (in a new covenant sense).

Concerning worship, because of Jesus, we can now worship Him in spirit and truth anywhere around the world (John 4:24).

Concerning the workplace, all of our work is to be done as an act of worship to the Lord (Col 3:22–25).

Concerning behavior, God's people should demonstrate an ethic that is characterized by integrity and sacrificial love (Rom 12:9–21).

Concerning restitution, we should seek to make all things right and be generous since Jesus has changed our selfish hearts.

Concerning holiness, because God has given us His Spirit, let us bear the fruit of the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16–26).

Concerning social justice, we should desire to care for those who are weak and vulnerable because God cared for us when we were the orphan, the widow, the foreigner, and the poor.

Concerning Sabbath and Festivals, we should remember God's grace by worshiping Him, obeying His Word, resting in His promises, and enjoying the Lord's Supper. This supper points us back to the Passover, to our Lord's death, and then forward to the new kingdom to come. There, in that kingdom, we will finally know what it is to live in a perfectly loving and just society. There, the lion will lie down with the lamb. There, peace and righteousness will dwell (2 Pet 3:13).

Conquest of Canaan Promised (EXODUS 23:20-33)

Consider three applications from this text:

1. Trust in God's _____ (23:20, 22b–23, 27–31)
God, the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer, goes before you in the battle. As far as our eternal salvation, the victory is already won. Therefore, since God has won the ultimate battle, we can rest assured that He will be with us in our smaller battles.

2. Obey God's _____ (23:21–22a, 24–25a, 31b, 32–33)

God made two essential demands on the Israelites. First, they were forbidden to worship the gods of the Canaanites (v. 24a). Second, God told them to destroy the idols and sacred stones of the Canaanites (v. 24b). For us, we should never compromise in giving God all our worship.

3. Receive God's _____ (23:25b–26, 29–30)

Next God promised to bless His people as His people served Him. God promised to protect and provide for His chosen people from which the Messiah would come.