**Exodus 21-23**

**Outline**

21:1-11: Laws about Slaves

21:12-27: Laws about Personal injury

21:28-36: Laws about Ox goring

22:1-4: Laws about Theft

22:5-6: Laws Concerning your field

22:7-15: Theft when you are watching someone else’s property

22:16-17: Law about pre-marital relations

22:18-23:9: Many random laws

23:10-19: Laws concerning Sabbath

23:20-33: Laws concerning conquest

Prohibition against worshipping idols (20:3-6, 23; 22:20; 23:13, 24, 32-33)

**Introduction**

I realize that when we get to these sections of scripture, most people do not get super excited. I am always excited about what we are studying but most people find sections like this confusing, random, dry, and irrelevant.

**1. Law is Worthy of Meditation**

* Ps 1:2; 119:97
* Clarification: Law can describe entire OT (Jn 10:34; 1 Cor 14:21, 34)

**2. Valuable because of the ONE who gave it**

* Ps 119:72

**3. Regard for Holiness**

* 22:31

God is not simply trying to be random nor is He trying to be unique and bazaar. His goal is to direct the people to live holy lives. God has the same desire to for us to live in a holy fashion!

**Exodus 21**

**21:1-11: Laws about Slaves**

Much of Israelite law dealt with what we would call “Case Law.” It is not saying that God wants people to become slaves, seduce virgins (22:16-17), or get divorced (Dt. 24:1-4) but in the event these things happen this is the law that govern the events.

**1-6** If a man becomes a slave then the maximum he is allowed to serve is 6 years and on the 7th year he will go free without having to buy his freedom (21:2). If he brings a family with him then the owner must provide for the family and they leave together.

If the man became a slave while he was single the master could give him a wife but when the man left after 6 years, the wife and children stayed behind.

The slave can choose of his own free will to stay (21:5-7). Some rabbi stated he still went free in the year of Jubilee.

**7-11** If a man sold his daughter then it is for the purpose she will be the wife to the person who bought her or wife to her child. She is to be treated as a wife or daughter (21:7-9).

If she is displeasing, then she can be redeemed by her father but cannot be sold to a foreign people (21:8). If he takes another wife, then he must provide her with three things:

A. Food

B. Clothing

C. Her marital rights

**21:12-27: Laws about Personal injury**

**15, 17** This would violate the 5th commandment (20:12). Either striking (21:15) or cursing (21:17) a parent would result in the death penalty. The promise of the 5th commandment was you would live long if you obeyed your parents but failure to obey will result in death.

**20-21** If the slave is killed because of the beating then the master faces judgment. However, if he gets and walks after a day (and survives) then no judgment is taken since it is the master financial loss.

**22-25** The NASB does a poor job of translating these verses. The word translated “miscarriage” is the Hebrew stem *yatsa* and it means “to go out, emerge.” It is the same word that is used to talk of the birth of Esau (Gen. 25:25), Tamar giving birth to twins (Gen. 38:28), the birth of a child (Num. 12;12), and the birth of Job (Job 1:21; 3:11).

The word does not mean the woman miscarried, it means the woman is giving birth! So, if she gives birth and the child is fine then the husband may demand a fine. If there is damage then the law of Lex Talionis is applied which includes death if the child was dead. God places the highest levels of importance on life. Yes, life in the womb is still life and if it is taken then the death penalty must be enforced.

**26-27** If bodily damage is done to the slave by the master then the slave goes free.

**21:28-36: Laws about Ox goring**

**28-32** If an ox gores a man then the ox is to be put to death and if the owner had been warned but did nothing then the owner could be put to death. The owner can redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded of him (31).

If the ox gores a slave, then 30 shekels of silver is to be given to the owner.

**Exodus 22**

**22:1-4: Laws about Theft**

**1, 3b-4** If a man steals something and kills or sells it then he is to repay 4 (sheep) or 5 (oxen) times as much as he stole. If it is found in his possession then he will pay double. This might indicate that an ox was rarer and more valuable in farm work.

Referenced: This is the law that David refers to in 2 Samuel 12:5-6.

***Other Law Codes from Ancient world***

* Law Code of Hammurabi
* The Laws of Eshnunna
* Middle Assyrian Laws
* Laws of the Hittites

Some of these law codes have similarities to the Biblical Laws[[1]](#footnote-1) and others are differences. One of the major differences is that the Biblical law code holds a much higher respect for human life. In Hammurabi’s law you could be killed for theft. In middle Assyrian laws women who stole were mutilated. Hittite law called for heavy repayment of goods stolen. “The Biblical scale gives priority to the protection of life—even the life of the burglar—over the protection of property.

**2-3a** If the break in occurs at night and the owner, in seeking to defend his house, kills the thief then there is no guilt, but if the sun has risen and everything can be clearly seen then there is guilt.

Rabbi’s suggested in the dark you do not know what the robber’s intentions are thus you are absolved from guilt. However, in the light of day you know if they have a weapon or not.

**22:5-6: Laws Concerning your field**

**5** Cannot allow your animal to graze in another’s field. Must make restitution from the **best** of your field. This may not have been as accidental or careless as at first appears. Some vineyards had a wall around them (Isa 5:5) which would mean the animal owner might have to let them into the vineyard.

**6** Setting field on fire (Jud. 15:4-5; 2 Sam. 14:30)

**22:7-15: Theft when you are watching someone else’s property**

**7-9** Man is keeping property for another and goods are stolen if he had no involvement then he does not have to repay.

Pay double (22:4, 7, 9)

**10-13** **Driven away…** This speaks of raiders as in Job 1:14-15.

**If torn let him bring evidence…** The shepherd could bring a torn animal to show that something out of his control happened (Amos 3:12). Additionally, this would show that he made an attempt to rescue the animal (1 Sam 17:34-35).

**14-15** Based on my reading this law is difficult to translate and it is debate what exactly is meant. If animal is barrowed then repayment depends on if owner was with animal or not.

**22:16-17: Law about pre-marital relations**

**16** Man seduces a virgin then she is to become his wife after he pays her dowry. According to Deuteronomy 22:28-29 the “bride-price” was 50 shekels of silver. The money seems to be given to the bride eventually (hence reason Rachel and Leah were upset in Gen 31:15). “In the Aramaic legal document of the Jewish colony in Elephantine, in Egypt, deriving from the second half of the 5th century BC, the *mohar* (bride-price) was paid to the father but counted among the wife’s possessions.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

**17** The father can refuse the marriage but if he does the man who seduced the girl still has to pay the dowry. See Gen 34:12.

The father also could request the *mohar* (bride-price) in another form other than money.

* Caleb gives daughter to Othniel (Josh 15:16; Judg 1:12)
* David’s marriage to Saul’s daughter (1 Sam 18:25)

**22:18-31: Many random laws**

**18-20** There are three things in a row that are listed that will receive the death penalty for: sorcery, Bestiality, and apostasy. All three of these things lead people away from God.

A. You shall not allow a sorceress to live

* Lev. 19:31; 20:27; Num. 22-24; Dt. 18:9-14
* King Saul removed mediums and spiritists (1 Sam. 28:3, 9)
* King Saul goes to visit a medium, vows by the Lord she will not die (1 Sam 28:7-10)
* Sorcery and child sacrifice connected in Dt 18:9-14; 2 Kgs 21:6

B. Bestiality gets the death penalty

* Lev. 18:23; 20:15-16

In the garden the animals were not suitable helpers for Adam and they are forbidden from mating with them here.

C. Worshiping another god

* Ex 20:3-6

**21** **You shall not wrong a stranger…** The reason given is because you know what it is like to be oppressed and wronged because you were a stranger in Egypt. It is laws like this that I think that Jesus sums up the entire law as do unto others… (Mt 7:12).

This verse also reminds us that God always welcomed other nations and wants Israel to show love to them (Lev 19:33-34; Dt 10:18-19).

**21-24** You shall not take advantage of anyone. Not a stranger because you were once strangers in Egypt. Not a widow or orphan, but if you do and they cry to God then God will kill the tormentor with the sword making his wife a widow and children fatherless.

**Abuse them… they cry out to me…** I will hear their cry (22:22-23). This is exactly what Israel did when Egypt abused them (2:23-25; 3:7-9).

**25** **Lending to the poor, do not charge interest…** You could not charge interest to an Israelite, but you could a foreigner (Dt 23:19-20). This is violated in Nehemiah 5.

**Lending of money, food at interest…** Lev. 25:35-37; Dt 23:19. The interest rates for on silver in the ancient world was typically 20-25% and the interest on grain was 33.3% with some factors for wiggle room. Sometimes they could reach as high as 50%![[3]](#footnote-3)

**26-27** **Taking clock in pledge…** You are supposed to return it to him each night. In 7th century BC a Hebrew inscription speaks of a complaint “of an agricultural laborer that the officer in charge was holding his garment pending satisfaction of a disputed claim that the worker had not fulfilled his obligations.[[4]](#footnote-4)

See Job 22:6; Amos 8:2

**For I am gracious…** Just as God promised to hear the cry of the oppressed (22:22-23) so, too, He will be gracious toward the one who is poor.

**28** **Do not curse God or ruler…** 1 Kings 21:13 (Naboth); Lev 24:15-16; the ruler could kill or could spare (see 2 Sam 16:9-10; 1 Kgs 2:8-9).

**29-30** 8th day of animal’s life they are acceptable sacrifice (Lev 22:27)

**31** **Torn animals…** Command for holiness

**Exodus 23**

**Outline**

23:1-9: Laws concerning Justice

23:10-19: Sabbath and Feast days

23:20-33: Conquest

**23:1-9: Laws concerning Justice**

Remember, the chapters and verses were added later so there has just been a call to holiness (22:30) and then there is a discussion of justice.

**1-3** **Do not bear a false report…** There should be nothing false allowed in justice. JPS commentary translates false rumor which indicates staying away from unsubstantiated claims.

**Do not follow the masses…** Truth is not determined by majority.

**No partiality for the poor…** God does not show partiality (Dt 10:16-17; Acts 10:34-35) and humanity should follow that example. While we often discuss the problem of the rich getting what they want sometimes we can feel sorry for someone and it can sway us to do what is not just.

**4-5** **Help even your enemy...** There animal is wandering away (Dt 22:1-3) or they have fallen under a load (Dt 22:4). This law assumes you would help your friend or aquaintence so it emphasizes those who you are at odds with. Interestingly, one is not to join his hand with an evil person (23:1), but you are to join your hands to your enemy to assist him!

**6** **Poor man…** Do not side with the poor just because he is poor (23:3) but also do not deny him justice because he is poor. Simply do justice and do not worry about a person’s economic status.

**7** **I will not acquit the guilty…** God knows what justice is and He is not bound by what a human court says (1 Cor. 4:3-5). Even if we miscarry justice, He will not.

**8** **Bribes…** Dt 10:17; 16:19; Prov 15:27; 17:23; Isa 5:22-23

**9** Don’t mistreat stranger (22:21). Learn from the mistakes of others. You know what it is like to be mistreated so do not repeat that mistake to others.

**23:10-19: Laws concerning Sabbath and feasts**

**10-11** **Sabbath year…** For more details see Lev 25:1-7, 18-22. This would have had been a great benefit to the land to allow it rest which would preserve the fertility of the soil and enhance the future productivity.

The purpose stated is that the needy and beast of the field will be taken care of. We have two satsuma trees in our yard (Monticello, FL) and have never done anything to them, but they bear pretty good. ***This means there would be some harvesting in the Sabbath year.***

Was the Sabbath year ever observed? No clear reference. See Nehemiah 10:31. 1 Macc. 6:49-53.

**12 Sabbath day…** Ex 20:8-11. In 23:10-12 we see God’s concern for land, animals, servants, and strangers. The land and animals rest, humans are refreshed. This could be a reference to spiritual life.

**13** Name of false gods is not to be on your lips. You are not to take the name of the Lord in vain (20:7) nor to speak about another god.

**14-17** Three times a year all the males of Israel was to appear before the Lord (women and children: Dt. 16:11, 14; 1 Sam. 1; see Lk 2:41-52). You are not to appear before the Lord empty handed (23:15).

A. Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread (23:15): Deliverance

B. Feast of Harvest/Feast of Weeks/Pentecost: Completion of wheat harvest (see Ex 9:31-32)

C. Feast of Ingathering/Booths: Final gathering of fields and orchards

**Month of Abib…** 13:4; later changed to Nisan.

Since these feasts are connected with provision and deliverance this should motivate you to give back to the Lord for all He has done for you.

**23:20-33: Conquest**

**20-23 Sending an angel…** An angel that appeared to Moses in the burning bush (3:2) and identified as God (Ex 3:6, 14). God is said to lead the people by cloud and fire (Ex 13:21-22) and then that is said to be the angel of God that was leading them and controlling the cloud (Ex 14:19).

Purpose of the angel (a) guard you and (b) bring to place God prepared for them (23:20, 23).

**Guard…** Used three times in Ex 23:13, 20-21

* 23:13: Be on guard (Heb. shâmar), do not worship other gods
* 23:20: Angel will guard (Heb. shâmar) you, i.e. protect you
* 23:21: You be on guard (Heb. shâmar) not to sin

**Be an enemy to your enemy…** Obedience to the Lord comes with a promise that God will take care of their enemies. This is a powerful and beautiful promise. Notice how we are supposed to treat our enemies (23:4-5), but God will take care of our enemies.

**24-27** **Do not serve other gods…** 20:3-6, 23; 23:13, 32-33. This is a common refrain throughout the Bible. Rather than serve idols, Israel is called to serve the Lord and there are a host of blessing that are included with obedience:

* Bless your bread and water (food; see 15:22-27 and 16:1-35)
* Remove sickness from midst (15:26)
* Confuse enemies

**28** **Send the hornet…** This only appears two other times in the OT (Dt 7:20; Josh 24:12). No one really knows what it means (some translate it “plague”). Whatever is intended by it the idea is that God will give Israel victory over the inhabitants of the land.

**29-31** **I will not drive them out in a single year…** The reason for this is to prevent the land being taken over by wild beast (23:29; Dt 7:22). Other reasons are given later (Jud 3:2).

While this is not stated, I think another reason is to remind Israel that persistent faithfulness is needed to the Lord’s command. You cannot simply obey the Lord and then move on, it takes consistent, steady work to be obedient.

**Boundary…** 1 Chron 18:1-3

**32-33** **Forbidden to ally with foreign nation…** Making an alliance with a nation probably meant some acknowledgment of their god. See Joshua 9:9-11.

1. See Ex 22 in J. P Hyatt, Exodus in The New Century Bible Commentary, 236-245; see also Sarna, 129-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sarna, *Exodus*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sarna, *Exodus*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sarna, *Exodus*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)