

Exodus 21-23 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

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After God spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of *all* the people, they were so terrified they asked Moses to go and intercede for them, receiving the Word and law from the Lord and then coming back to them with it.

So Moses went up onto Mount Sinai to meet with the Lord and receive the words we find in chapters 21-23.

As we begin tonight's study, we ought to consider what we're reading here against the historical backdrop of that time.

All that we will read here, these laws, were written down and carried by Moses to the people. That in itself is important.

You see, every nation & kingdom that rose to power at that time had a law-code, a unifying body of rules that governed civilized society.

These laws were said by legend to have come from one of the gods, and given to the king, the ruler who was the first great leader of that nation.

For example, we have the story of Hammurabi, the first great leader of the Babylonians.

He was supposed to have received a special law-code which he passed on to his people, which ordered them into a society which was able to grow great and strong.

Every subsequent king drew his authority from his supposed appointment by the gods to carry on as the chief enforcer of that law-code.

When God gave the Law, He was doing so against the backdrop of this understanding.

The people understood that what the Lord was doing was forging them into a nation, a kingdom over which HE would be the ruler, not some earthly monarch.

And this is why ALL THE PEOPLE heard the words of the heart of the Law, the Ten Commandments.

They weren't just given to Moses, who then gave them to the people.

God didn't want them thinking of Moses as their monarch; their king.

They were to be a nation whose King *was* their God.

In giving them the Law, God was turning them from a mob into a nation.

These became the rules that ordered society and revealed the values & priorities that constitute the foundation of their community.

So, after receiving the Ten Commandments, which are the *heart* of the Law, Moses ascends the mount to receive the *rest* of the law, which he will then bring back to the people.

He now gets a detailed and elaborate set of civil, moral, and ceremonial laws that will govern the life of the nation for generations to come.

The ancient rabbis counted 613 specific laws in the Law of Moses.

Exodus 21-23 are called "*The Book of the Covenant*" and contain a many of these 613 commands.

They illustrate and help explain the *implications* of the Ten

Commandments for members of the covenant community. [\[1\]](#)

If the Ten Commandments can be likened to a skeleton, these chapters put the muscles and ligaments onto it – helping the children of Israel realize how the commandments are to be lived out among them.

What we find here is "Case Law" – rules that will assist the judges of Israel determine what is just and right as they render verdicts in the civil cases that come before them.

CHAPTER 21

4. 21:1-11 • Laws regarding servants

1 "Now these *are* the judgments which you shall set before

them:

By the word “judgments” we understand what follows as “case law” for deciding civil cases brought before the judges of Israel.

2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.

Right off the bat, God lays down rules governing the treatment of *servants*.

The treatment of kings doesn't find the first place, but rather, the very bottom of the social ladder finds priority.

This was unheard of in the ancient world as slaves were considered little more than *property*.

This is an evidence of the radical difference between the rest of the world and God's people – they aren't to see servants as *mere objects* – they are *people*, created in God's image and for His glory, not man's.

The very first words God spoke in the hearing of all the people when he gave the Ten Commandments was to remind them of Who He was and who they had just been – slaves in Egypt!

While they were a new people because of His redemptive work, they were never to forget the trial and sorrow of their bondage. And this enduring memory was to affect the way they treated slaves.

Slavery is an emotional and highly charged topic.

But as with everything else, we need to set it in its proper *historical* setting.

When *we* think of slavery, we tend to identify it in terms of the slavery known in this country prior to the Civil War; *African slavery* in the plantation economy of the South.

That was a brutal, oppressive and terribly unjust system of exploitation.

But it's *not characteristic* of the majority of slavery throughout history.

In the ancient world, when almost all economy was based in agriculture and most people lived off the sweat of their own brow and what they could grow and trade, slavery was an institution far different from what it became at a *few* points in history.

A household might have one, or maybe two slaves who were vital to the family's *economic health*.

And because of that, servants were generally treated *well*, almost as members of the family because of the intimate working relationship they had to the master and head of the household.

Keep that in mind – most slavery was on a small scale; in that a man might own one or two slaves – not masses of them.

It was at those *rare times in history* when slavery was *massive*; when one master owned dozens or hundreds of slaves, or the slaves were the property of the *state*, that slavery became *dehumanizing*.

In Egypt, in Rome, and in the plantation economy of the South.

But what we find here in the Law of Moses was simply unheard of in the ancient world – that slavery was a *limited* state. God put a cap on it – 6 years!

The reason for this is that He didn't want slaves to be seen as just that, slaves! They were *men*, and men *ought to be free*.

Slavery was merely a *condition*, and one that a person might fall into for any number of reasons – debt being the main one.

There were 4 main ways a Jew might become a slave to *another* Jew:

1) Extreme poverty • When they just couldn't provide for themselves, they might sell themselves as *indentured servants* (Leviticus 25:39).

2) A father could sell his children into service of another (Exodus 21:7).

3) Bankruptcy • As a way to pay off one's debts (2 Kings 4:1).

4) Restitution • If a thief had nothing with which to pay (Exodus 22:3-4).

In these cases, the service was for a *maximum* of 6 years.

In the 7th year, he would be set free.

But a lot can happen in 6 years, so the law goes on to stipulate some additional rules.

3 If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

When the 6 years of his servitude were over, he went out as he came in.

If he came in a single man, he went out single. If he was married when he came in, he takes his wife with him into freedom.

In Deut 15:13-15 a further rule was added to this.

When the servant was released the master was obligated to provide a “start-up” gift for his servant; something that would assist him in his attempt to re-establish himself as a free-man in the community.

4 If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself.

Now, this seems harsh – but there was nothing in the slave’s term which said he HAD to take a wife.

If he did, then he knew he was running the risk of having to leave them under his master’s rule *or* of redeeming them once he was free.

What about the servant who decides serving his master is actually a *better life* than being free unto himself?

What if he is so in love with his wife and kids he can’t bear the thought of going out without them?

Well, God made provision for that as well . . .

5 But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’⁶ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

This decision by the servant was not to be motivated by debt or obligation, but only by love for the master.

If the servant decided to stay and commit himself willingly to the master, then in the presence of witnesses, he would be taken to the front door of the house, his ear would be placed on the doorpost, and an awl would be pressed through the fleshy lobe.

In this way – he would be *attached* to the house.

Once the piercing was made, the awl would be withdrawn, and the master would put a ring through the hole, a permanent symbol of perpetual service.

The servant then wore that earring as a badge of honor and distinction – he was a *bondservant*, a *bond-slave* – permanently attached to the house of his master.

In Psalms 40:6 this image of the bondservant is used as a picture of the Messiah.

Speaking prophetically for the Messiah, the psalmist says,
**Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears
You have opened.**

The word “*opened*” here means “*dug*” or “*bored*;” *pierced* is a good interpretation.

The Messiah is saying that God did not want some *external* offering; what He was looking for was the offering of one’s *self* – and the Messiah has given it – Himself, as a perpetual servant of the Lord.

Paul says the same thing in referring to Jesus in Philippians 2:7 –
**[He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form
of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of
men. [2]**

What we have in this interesting little practice is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about where else we read of the door and doorpost.

What has just been applied to the doorpost? The blood of the Passover lamb!

And now the servant is taken there and attached to that blood-stained doorpost.

There’s a connection between the Passover lamb and the servant.
EXACTLY!

Jesus came to this earth and took upon Himself *our humanity*.

We were all *slaves* of sin.

He could have gone out free. He could have returned to heaven, to His position in the Godhead, without going through the *doorway of death*.

He did not have to die upon the Cross. But He willingly came down to earth and took upon Himself our humanity.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Psalms 40:6–8 goes on to say,

6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. 7 Then I said, “Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me. 8 I delight to do

Your will, O my God, And Your law *is* within my heart.” [3]

Hebrews 10:5–9 says that Psalm 40 is *prophetic* of Christ. It was fulfilled when Jesus came to this earth and allowed not only his ear, but His whole body to be *pierced* and *attached* to the wood of the cross.

He chose not to go out free *without* us. He could have left this earth without dying, but He said, “I love My Bride. I love the sinner.”

So He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross so that He could redeem us from the slavery of sin. [4]

Vs. 1-6 applied to *male* servants. A different law was given for women.

7 “And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. ⁹ And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. ¹⁰ If he takes another *wife*, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without *paying* money.

The Law commanded that a *man* who had become a slave to pay his debts should be freed in the seventh year of his service.

No such law of *manumission* was given for *female* slaves. Why? This was NOT a case of *prejudice*, but of *protection*.

You see, female slaves usually became *concubines* to their master.

Once a woman had been a concubine, she would have been unlikely to find a man willing to *marry* her and without marriage, she would have had little means of surviving on her own in the cultures of that time.

In fact, the culture of that day was not conducive to *anyone*—male or female—living as a single person. [5]

So this Law was meant to provide *protection* for female servants. Some Hebrew fathers thought it more advantageous for their daughters to become concubines of well-to-do neighbors than to become the wives of men in their own social class. If a daughter who became a servant was not pleasing to her master she was to be redeemed by a near kinsman (Lev. 25:47-54) She could NEVER be sold to foreigners (Ex. 21:8). She could also redeem herself. If she married her master's son she was to be given *family status* (v. 9). If the master married someone else he was required to provide his servant with 3 essentials: food, clothing, and shelter. [6] This idea of women, and specially women of the lower social & economic classes, having such rights, respected by God & society was revolutionary in an age when women were usually regarded as property. [7]

5. 21:12-36 • Laws concerning violence

a. 12-27 – man on man violence

12 “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. ¹³ However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered *him* into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. ¹⁴ “But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

God establishes the principle of *capital punishment* in the case of murder.

But He makes a distinction between *accidental* and *premeditated* murder.

In the case of accidental death, or *manslaughter*, special places of refuge will be set up throughout the land.

The one who accidentally killed another will be able to flee there and find protection from those who would desire to exact revenge.

But if it can be proven that it *wasn't* accidental, that the murderer

actually *planned* it, then there would *be* no refuge – he was to be executed.

15 “And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

The word “strikes” here ought to be understood in the same way as in v. 12 – a blow that is meant to kill.

This refers to a person who shows such disdain and rebellion for his parents that he lashes out against them with serious violence.

His blows may not outright kill his mother or father, but it’s clear that was his intent.

In such a case, he’s to be put to death!

And the reason why is because such violence against one’s parents is a fundamental violation of the 5th Commandment to honor parents, a commandment which under girds the whole idea of honor and order in society.

The man who violently rebels against his parents, if left without judgment, will introduce a moral and spiritual infection into society which will work great harm to many.

This is why God attaches a promise to the 5th commandment – but we’ll examine that on the Sunday we get to it.

16 “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.

Kidnapping was a crime worthy of capital punishment.

17 “And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

This is an extension of v. 15 and the idea of a basic denial of the 5th Commandment to honor father and mother.

Now, don’t think this means when some 9 year old Jewish child “*dissed*” his parents they lopped off his head.

This referred to those sons or daughters who consistently adopted a posture of defiance and rebellion against their parents and made life in the home a curse.

Also, this was meant to be a guideline used by the *judges* of Israel. A father couldn’t take a club to his kid just because he cussed at him!

The parents would bring the child to the judges who would hear

the evidence and render a verdict.

And in the case of a son or daughter who was behaving this way, the searchlight of inquiry by the judges would be focused on who? *The parents* and their parenting of that child.

18 “If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but is confined to *his* bed, ¹⁹ if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck *him* shall be acquitted. He shall only pay *for* the loss of his time, and shall provide *for him* to be thoroughly healed.

A man hurt in a violent encounter was to receive compensation for the time lost due to his injuries, as well as to have his medical bills paid.

20 “And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished.

This rule was meant specifically for *foreign* slaves, not *Hebrew* servants, who were covered in vs. 1-11.

A Hebrew servant was always treated in the light of the fact that he would be set free.

Foreign slaves were a different matter – they were *not* set free.

What we find in v. 20 was a radical departure from the laws of that time.

Slaves were considered as nothing more than *property*, expensive and valued property, **for sure** – but *property* nonetheless.

They were *not persons* with legal rights under the law.

So in other cultures, if you killed your slave, you were just considered *foolish*, not morally wrong.

Not so in Israel – killing a slave was *murder*, and the murderer was to be executed.

21 Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he *is* his property.

This exception to verse 20 is given because it speaks to the issue of *intent*, and falls under the principles set out in vs. 12-14.

The master who intended to KILL his slave would beat him to death on the spot!

If the slave lived a few days, it meant it was not the *intent* of the master to kill him.

In such a case, the loss of the slave and the role he performed in the house would be considered enough of a punishment for the master.

22 “If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.²³ But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life,²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Damages resulting from violence are to be assessed against the guilty parties.

These judgments must be just and equal to the damage.

An eye will pay for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and so on.

This is the principle of *lex talionis* equal law.

What we find here is *not a license* for revenge, but a *limitation* on it.

You see, when we’re harmed, it’s human nature to not only want to get even, but to add to it so as to make the other person pay for our hurt and grief.

You step on my toe, I step on yours and give you a shove.

You give me a shove and punch me in the stomach.

I punch you in the stomach and stick my finger in your eye.

You stick your finger in my eye and bite my ear. And on and on it goes!

These rules were meant to assist the judges of Israel in assessing the right judgment to make when damages resulted from violence.

26 “If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye.²⁷ And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.

These verses show us the real texture slavery was to have in Israel.

God was looking for anything that would see people move out of

bondage and in to freedom.

He did not want His people holding slavery as the normal or accepted condition.

Men and women are meant to be free, and God wanted them to value freedom, politically, economically, and spiritually.

b. 28-32 – animal on man violence

Okay – we'll have to just read the next sections with less comment.

28 “If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox *shall be acquitted*.

Oxen could be pretty feisty and were known to rear their heads and impale people.

Any ox which killed someone was to be put down.

29 But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.

Some oxen have a dangerous disposition and will attack anyone who comes close.

Is such an ox is not kept tied up, the owner is showing a callous disregard for human life and if that ox kills someone, it's as if *HE* had committed murder with pre-meditation.

30 If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. ³¹ Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.

Once the judges have heard the case, they may decide there's not been enough firm evidence that the owner of the deadly ox was criminally negligent to the point of being guilty of murder.

In that case, they will fine him restitution fees, payable to the family of the deceased.

32 If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

This would be for a *foreign* slave. A Hebrew servant would be treated as a freeman and so would fall under v. 28.

c. 33-36 – man/animal on animal violence

33 “And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, ³⁴ the owner of the pit shall make *it* good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead *animal* shall be his. ³⁵ “If one man’s ox hurts another’s, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide. ³⁶ Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.

These rules convey the idea of *carefulness* with the property of others, which leads into ch. 22 . . .

CHAPTER 22

6. 22:1-15 • Property laws

a. 1-4 – theft of property

1 “If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

Private ownership of property was a basic right under the Law of God.

There are far-reaching implications of that principle and truth as we consider such things as political and economic philosophy. We’ll get in to some of those implications when we consider the 8th Commandment in depth.

For now, notice that theft of personal property was to be punished, not by sticking the thief in jail, but by sentencing him to make restitution to his victim, many times over the value of what he stole.

What do we do with thieves under our system today?

Well, if they are even caught and convicted, we stick them in jail, where they end up being fed 3 squares, watch a lot of TV, and play pin-pong in a rec room.

They are given jobs as phone solicitors.

How would it effect theft if convicted thieves were made to work

and had to repay their victims 4 to 5 times the value of what they stole?

2 If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, *there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed.* ³ If the sun has risen on him,

Meaning the burglar has fled the scene of the crime - ***there shall be guilt for his bloodshed.***

The victim of burglary cannot go after the burglar and off him off-site of the crime – that’s murder! Instead, the burglar -

He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. ⁴ If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand,

As opposed to already disposed of as in v. 1 -

whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.

The owner of property had the right to protect his property *with force* - but only with reasonable force.

If he found a burglar breaking and entering his home, if in resisting him the burglar was killed, there would be no punishment because the *intent* of the burglar could not be determined and the owner has sufficient cause to be concerned for his life.

It’s sad to hear about the court cases today where some burglar is injured in the course of breaking and entering a house or business, and they sue the property owner and win damages!

I guess the rule is, if you’re going to try to stop a burglar, you better kill him so he can’t sue you.

b. 5-6 – loss of fields & produce

5 “If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. ⁶ “If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

More rules concerning the protection of private property.

These rules apply directly to cases of simple negligence – not

keeping tabs on your grazing stock or what your fire is doing. Regarding honoring the property of another, it's not enough to just not steal – one must also show carefulness so that you don't even *inadvertently* damage what belongs to another.

How are you with your car door in public parking lots?

How are you with your trash?

c. 7-8 – property lent out

7 “If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man’s house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. ⁸ If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor’s goods.

The judges will determine if there's been a real theft by a burglar or if the one lent the goods in fact made off with them.

d. 9-15 – misc. property disputes

9 “For any kind of trespass, *whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. ¹⁰ If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, ¹¹ then an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor’s goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good.*

Stuff happens – animals die, things break and get lost.

If there's been some property loss and there's no way to determine that a crime's been committed, then the owner just has to take his lumps!

This is something that seems to be a lost truth in today litigious, sue-happy society.

Sometimes, bad things happen – it doesn't mean someone is to blame or ought to be held legally or morally responsible.

In an attempt to make society safe, the government has passed such restrictive laws that it's placed limitations on our freedoms

that are ridiculous.

You can't legislate common sense, but the government seems bent on doing just that.

Seat belts and helmets – air bags, child cars-seats, these are all wonderful and important things – but to *legislate* them is absurd!

Don't get me wrong, all these safety devices are good and necessary, but when the law tells us we have to use or wear them, where does it stop?

Now they're considering what kind of vehicles to allow on the road. SUV's could be banned!

Vs. 9-11 remind us that just because there's a loss of some kind, that does not mean someone's to blame.

We live in a fallen, sin-cursed world where stuff breaks, dies and wears out. Live with it!

12 But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. ¹³ If it is torn to pieces by a *beast*, then he shall bring it as evidence, *and* he shall not make good what was torn. ¹⁴ “And if a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not *being* with it, he shall surely make *it* good.

You borrow something and break it, replace it!

15 If its owner was with it, he shall not make *it* good;

Meaning something that belongs to another simply breaks while you're *using* it, but the two of you are working *together*.

Let me use an example:

My neighbor and I are putting up a new fence and I own a posthole digger.

My neighbor is using it an one time when he slams it into a hole, the wood handle shears off at the sleeve. He's not liable to replace it.

if it was hired [rented], it came for its hire [rental price].

7. 22:16-17 • Violation of a virgin

16 “If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her *to be*

his wife. ¹⁷ If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.

If a man has sex with a virgin woman, he's to marry her if her father will consent.

In any case, he's to pay the *full price* for a bride.

That would be an *expensive* moment of pleasure.

8. 22:18-31 • Misc. moral & ceremonial laws

In the verses we've covered so far tonight, we've read the word "If" *42 times*.

In this section, vs. 18-31, it's found just 3 times.

The point is this – everything we've read up till now has been simple case law, guidelines for the courts of Israel to use in deciding civil cases.

But what we find in the next few verses is far more serious.

There's to be no deliberation, not court case.

If these crimes are committed, there's to be instant judgment.

18 "You shall not permit a sorceress to live.

19 "Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.

20 "He who sacrifices to *any* god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

21 "You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

22 "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; ²⁴ and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

This becomes a real hot-button with the Lord – the justice shown to widows and orphans, the least powerful in society of that time.

25 "If you lend money to *any of My people who are poor* among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest.

The charging of usury or interest was prohibited among the Jews.

26 If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge [collateral], you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. 27 For that *is* his only covering, it *is* his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I *am* gracious.

Note that, it's important!

When people cry out to God for help, He will consider if they need help *because* someone has harmed or cheated them.

If so, whoa to the one who did the wrong!

We need to catch the principle behind what God says here.

He says that even though *by rights*, by the principles of *strict justice*, you can *keep* the coat of the man who owes you and is using that coat as collateral on his loan, justice, as important as it is, is not the highest moral or ethical principle – grace is!

As God's covenant people, because GOD is gracious, we don't operate on the basis of *strict* or *bare* justice; we live in *grace* – not just *receiving* it from God, but *showing* it to one another.

28 “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

Notice how the two things are linked.

We demonstrate submission to the God we cannot see by showing deference and honor to the rulers we do see.

29 “You shall not delay *to offer* the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. 30 Likewise you shall do with your oxen *and* your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.

Listen – this is crucial: *Delayed* obedience is nothing but *disobedience*!

31 “And you shall be holy men to Me: you shall not eat meat torn *by beasts* in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

Don't miss the contrast here – God says that they are to be *men*, not animals!

Archaeologists have gone a long way in revealing what life was like in some of the ancient cultures of the world, and truly, they lived like animals!

Morality, ethics, law, order, were negligible in many places and among many people.
These laws that God gave to His people were meant to build a just, equitable and moral society that would see all people blessed.

CHAPTER 23

9. 23:1-9 • Justice for all!

1 “You shall not circulate a false report.

Gossip is out!

Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

No conspiracies to pervert the courts.

2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert *justice*. 3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

While God pays special attention to the needs of the poor and weak, He also does not want any special favoritism shown to them that would alter or pervert justice.

Justice in the courts of Israel was to be blind!

4 “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

Love your enemy and do good to him.

6 “You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. 7 Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. 8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. 9 “Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

These guidelines were meant specifically for the judges of Israel as they doled out verdicts and rendered judgments in the cases that

came before them.

10. 23:10-13 • The Sabbath

10 “Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, ¹¹ but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.

This rule established the Sabbath year.

Every 7th year, they were to let their fields lie fallow and only harvest what came up of its own accord.

The poor were also allowed to go in to the fields and glean.

We’ll take a closer look at the Sabbatical year later when it’s covered in greater depth.

12 Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

The weekly Sabbath was the main reminder and memorial to their covenant with God, so He repeatedly reminded them in the Law about the importance of keeping the Sabbath day.

13 “And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.

11. 23:14-19 • The annual feasts

14 “Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); ¹⁶ and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in *the fruit of your labors from the field.*

Details regarding these feasts will be given us in Leviticus so we’ll

save further comment till then.

17 “Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. ¹⁸ “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. ¹⁹ The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

And then this rather strange command which is meant to stand alone - **You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.**

The pagan Canaanites had a fertility rite that did just this during their spring celebration, but God calls for His people to not only *not* imitate them, but to show *respect for life*, even the life of animals.

The Jewish rabbis understood God to be saying this very thing.

They ruled that when an animal from the herd or flock was killed, it was not to be witnessed by its mother.

But the rabbis didn’t stop there – as is typical for the growth of legalism, they turned this simple command to not imitate pagan fertility rights and honor life into an elaborate set of rules that govern diet and cooking.

To this day, observant Jews cannot eat a *kosher cheeseburger*, because they cannot mix meat and dairy.

To do so, they say, might violate this command to not boil, or “*stew*” a young goat in its mother’s milk.

The rabbis insist that the meat in the hamburger may have come from the calf of the cow that gave the milk for the cheese, and the cheese and the meat would “boil” together in one’s stomach, and be a violation of this command.

So, kosher kitchens have separate refrigerators; one for dairy, one for meat.

They have separate cooking pots and utensils; separate plates and flatware, all to keep meat and dairy separate.

12. 23:20-33 • The plan to take Canaan

20 “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹ Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your

transgressions; for My name *is* in Him. ²² But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³ For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.

This angel is none other than Jesus Christ.

The word *angel* means “messenger” and that’s what we see *this* angel doing – speaking to them the message of God and leading them in the way the Lord wants them to go.

It’s clear this angel is of *higher station* than your normal, run-of-the-mill angels because God’s name is in Him, and He sits in *judgment* on Israel.

The Lord also directs the people to *obey* Him and to treat Him with the same kind of deference they treat Him as God.

There’s another clear sign this refers to Jesus in that v. 21 refers to the angel forgiving sins – which only God can do.

This angel will bring them in to the place God has prepared, just as the Lord Jesus is our *forerunner*, who’s gone before us to open the way to eternal life and prepare a place for us in glory.

24 You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their *sacred pillars*.

God warned the Jews that when they finally arrived in Canaan, they were not to settle down *with* the Canaanites but were to *supplant* them.

These sacred pillars were in fact massive wooden *phallic symbols* ; abominable images dedicated to their worship of the fertility gods and goddesses; which practice was corrupt and unspeakably immoral.

25 “So you shall serve the LORD your God,

Meaning in the ways described here in chs. 21-23

and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. ²⁶ No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill

the number of your days.

God promised general physical health and prosperity to the people as they obeyed and served Him.

27 “I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you.

They will run away in battle.

28 And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you.

God would even use nature as their allies in defeating the Canaanites and driving them out of the land. But . . .

29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. ³⁰ Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.

It would take a while for the Jews to grow to a number that would be sufficient to fully occupy all the territory God intended them to have.

So their occupation wouldn't be something they would complete in just a year's time – it would take longer.

As they grew in numbers, they would also grow in territory.

And since the fields and vineyards and cities would fall into ruin if the native Canaanites weren't there to tend to them, the Lord says they will only be supplanted as Israel grows in both number and faith in Him.

31 And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, [the region of] Philistia, and from the desert [of Arabia] to the [Euphrates] River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. ³² You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. ³³ They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”

CONCLUSION

God's plan was to turn all of Canaan over to the descendants of Jacob, but as we see here, only as they moved forward by faith and by the blessing of the Lord did they lay claim to it.

As Paul says in 1 Cor. 10 – the story of the Exodus is an enduring lesson for us as we follow Christ.

Canaan represents the spirit-filled life.

And just as the Angel of the Lord led them into the Promised Land, so Jesus leads us into the life of the Spirit, walking in the blessings of God's grace.

But the spirit-filled life is not without challenges.

Just as the children of Israel had to move in and do battle with the native inhabitants, the Canaanites, so there are obstacles to *our* pressing forward and taking possession of all God intends for *us* – namely, the old inhabitants of our lives – old habits drawn from living in the world.

God has so much for us – but we don't get it all at once.

Just as the Israelites had to grow and take progressive possession of what was theirs, so do we.

Each battle they fought and every new region they took made them stronger and more confident in the Lord's strength and ability.

God wasn't just giving them more land, He was *growing them* as a people who could possess, enjoy, and *use* that land.

The same is true of our growth in the Spirit-filled life.

Every battle we face molds and shapes us into the image of Christ.

As Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:18 – we are being changed from glory *to* glory by the Spirit of the Lord.

Friend, don't despair or grow faint in the struggles you face.

Don't think walking in the Spirit is a life of smooth-sailing and that there's some place you come to in the Christian life where you rise above all trouble and are never bothered by anything ever again.

No matter how far you've come with Christ, while we walk in these bodies, on this earth, there is more room to grow, more spiritual territory to take, more giants to slay, more Jericho's to smash.

Learn to be a happy warrior! A soldier who delights to wield the sword and take the battle **TO** the enemy.

[1] Richards, L. 1991. *The Bible reader's companion*. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

[2] *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982. Thomas Nelson: Nashville

[3] *The New King James Version*. 1996, c1982. Thomas Nelson: Nashville

[4] McGee, J. V. 1997, c1981. *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) . Thomas Nelson: Nashville

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[6] Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

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