



Exodus 21:1-22:20

APPLYING THE LAW IN DAILY LIFE

Some of the misunderstanding of biblical laws on service/slavery arises from unconscious analogy to modern Western hemisphere slavery, which involved the stealing of people of a different race from their homelands, transporting them in chains to a new land, and selling them to an owner who possessed them for life... It is clear that the biblical law allowed for no such practices. Indeed...Israelite service could be so beneficial to a worker that he or she would choose to enlist for a lifetime with the same employer (21:5-6)... Israel's service/slavery laws should be understood in terms of their own history of slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians made the Israelite slaves on the basis of their ethnicity, forced them to serve as slaves for life, did not compensate them...and worked them unbearably hard as a means of keeping them weak and/or causing at least some to die under the burden of their slavery... God's laws implicitly condemned the Egyptian treatment of the Israelites as illegal by prohibiting the very practices the Egyptians had used...

—Douglas K. Stuart

The Ten Commandments provide the overall governing principles of God's law. The **Book of the Covenant** (Ex. 21-23) details some of the ways in which these principles were applied in specific situations.

- A. Obeying & Worshiping God Alone (20:22-26)
- B. Laws Dealing with Relationship with Others (21:1-27)
 - C. Laws Dealing with Property & Restitution (21:28-22:17)
 - D. Abominations in the Land (22:18-20)
 - C. Laws Dealing with the Poor & Disadvantaged (22:21-23:9)
- B. Laws Dealing with Relationship with God (23:10-19)
- A. Obeying & Worshiping God Alone (23:20-33)

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

- Principles are easy to understand but hard to _____.
- God cares about the _____ details of our daily lives.
- The _____ was central to all of life and work.
- Biblical law is given within the context of the ancient Near East yet it also stands in _____ to the ancient Near East.
- God reveals His words (*devarim*) and judgments (*mishpatim*) to all the people _____ asking them to consent to obey them.
- _____ people stand equally accountable under God's law.
- Human life is always valued higher than _____.

The Book of the Covenant is often compared to other ancient law codes, the most famous being the **Code of Hammurabi** (~1753 BC). Hammurabi ruled over Babylon from 1792-1750 BC, greatly expanding its power and influence.

One will not hesitate to see, in this code [Hammurabi], a moral and political masterpiece, as well as a legislative monument of the first order, whose historical value is inestimable. —Jean-Vincent Scheil

The Code of Hammurabi is one of the most important monuments in the history of the human race.

—Claude Johns

[The Code of Hammurabi] came less from the field of jurisprudence than from the realm of religion...

The king demonstrates to the gods that he has truly turned out to be a "just king." —Nahum Sarna

The Code of Hammurabi protects the nobility above all others, promotes vicarious punishments and bodily mutilation, and sees property as more valued than human life.

A FEW THOUGHTS FOR TODAY

1. Slavery/servanthood in the Bible is _____ in history.

- “Slavery” in the OT is “debt servitude” (22:3; cf. Lev. 25:39).
- “Chattel slavery” was considered a capital crime (21:16).
- The maximum contract for a servant was six years (21:2).
- An unmarried daughter could be “bought” both under a work contract and for an additional bridal price (21:7-11).
- Killing a servant was a capital crime (21:20).
- Injuring a servant brought immediate freedom (21:26-27).
- Israel was to always remember their past as slaves (22:21; 23:9).

2. Motives make a _____.

- Intentional murder resulted in capital punishment (21:12, 14).
- Unintentional killing brought protection (21:13; cf. Num 35:22-25).
- An animal owner is guilty if he knew his animal was dangerous and did nothing to protect others (21:28-29, 35-36).

3. Property is important but human life is _____.

- Personal property is to be respected and protected (21:33-22:15).
- A thief in the act of stealing property (when it is clear that stealing is his only intent) is not to be killed (21:2-3).
- A child in the womb is treated equally as human life (21:22-25).

4. The legal punishment must fit the crime (*lex talionis*).

- *An eye for an eye* was not taken literally but as a legal principle of just, equal punishment for a crime (21:23-25; cf. Matt. 5:38-42).

5. Restitution is better than retribution.

- Stolen/damaged property required restitution not death (22:1-6).
- Restitution helps restore peace (Heb., *shalom*, 18x in Ex. 21-22).

6. A society is only as _____ as its marriages and families.

- Physically attacking one’s parents or cursing them publicly was considered a crime against society as a whole (21:15, 17).
- A man seducing a woman for sex (to avoid the commitment of marriage) was to result in the paying of the bridal price (22:16-17).

7. Occultic practice, false religion, and sexual perversion mark a culture that has rejected God and is in dangerous decline.

- Sorcery, often using drugs, invited demonic influence (22:18).
- Sexual perversion was often involved in pagan religions (22:19).
- Pagan religions involved human sacrifice, often of children (22:20).

Compulsory, lifelong servanthood is prohibited within Israel.

—J. Alec Motyer

The Torah knows nothing of social stratification in matters of adjudication. It dispenses equal justice for all, irrespective of class distinction.

—Nahum Sarna

21:21 does not describe a servant dying (already covered in 21:20) but a servant being injured and unable to work for a day or two. In this case, the penalty is self-imposed on the owner who loses the services of the servant during this time (i.e., “it is his money”). Serious injury in such cases would result in the servant’s freedom.

In the ancient world...virtually no distinction was made between purposeful and accidental homicide. In the logic of the vengeance system, causing a death required the parallel causing of death to satisfy the grievance and make things equal.

—Douglas Stuart

The life-for-life formula is applied to the destruction of the fetus. The fetus, at any stage of development, is in the eyes of this law a living being.

—Meredith Kline

In God’s world, there is no such thing as a one-night stand with no accountability.

—David Thompson

How individuals behave within their family will be mirrored in their behavior outside the family.

—T. Desmond Alexander

Among the ancients, the practice of sorcery had two associations. First, contact with dark, demonic powers. Second, altered states through drugs and potions.

—David Guzik