

A note from Kathy

Exodus 20 revealed to us God's Ten Commandments; they would be the backbone on which all other laws would hang. Exodus 21-23 goes into even greater detail. Even though some of the judgments listed here are foreign to us today, we can learn much about the character of our God as we study the laws given to Israel as a theocracy. Ask God to open your eyes and your heart to his word this week.

Observation

1. Chapter 20 ended with God's clear instructions concerning the building of an altar for worship. What were the two clear instructions given?
2. Commandments 1-3 have to do with man's relationship to God. God is giving further instructions here for their worship. What might one be tempted to do when putting up an altar had God not clearly stated the simplicity he desired for an altar of worship?
3. Exodus 21:1-4, deals with the ownership of Hebrew slaves. What could have motivated a Hebrew man to sell himself as a slave?
4. All actions carry consequences; do you believe this example of having to sell oneself might cause others to think before they act?
5. What was the time limit of servitude for a Hebrew man?
6. What were the specifics concerning his departure?
7. If a Hebrew servant chose to stay with his master after his term of service, what could he do? What would be the duration of this new servitude? This would have been a decision not entered into lightly. What could possibly have motivated him to want to do this?

8. In this society it was not unheard of for a man in debt to sell his daughter to pay off his indebtedness. How was she to be treated?
9. The agreement of a man taking a Hebrew girl in exchange for a debt was to be considered permanent. God had just redeemed Israel from their bondage in Egypt. The Israelites were God's chosen people; they had experienced redemption personally. Look at verse 8; in the event the girl did not please her master, what did God say must happen?
10. If an Israelite sold his daughter, what was the expectation for her future? What might we call this? An arranged _____.
11. What does this reveal about the heart of God to protect women?
12. If the female slave was promised to the master's son to be his wife, she was to be given all the rights and privileges of a daughter. Specifically, what would those rights have been? And if any were denied her, what was to happen to the debt she was paying off?
13. In verses 12-17, we see a series of serious offences, so serious that to commit them would bring a penalty of death. List these six offences. Only one of them has an exception clause; what is the exception?
14. In verses 18-22, we are given instruction on how to deal with cases of personal injury.
 - a. If men are fighting and one hits the other and injures him, but does not kill his opponent, what is the penalty?
 - b. God has left room for correction and discipline, but if a man beats his slave with a rod and the slave dies, then what must happen?
 - c. If, while men are fighting, they accidentally hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth, but no serious injury occurs, what is the penalty?
15. How do verses 23-25 speak to the issue of serious injuries? Please note these are guidelines for judgment, not license for revenge. They are in place in order to keep them from exaggerated punishments. Put these verses in to your own words.

16. Verses 26-27 deal with servants who suffer the loss of an eye or tooth. What is the penalty? How would this inspire masters to care for servants?
17. Verses 28-32 address accidents resulting from a bull. Most families would own a bull since they could be used to do much work. What would these laws inspire the owner to do?
18. Verses 33-34 deal with someone who digs a hole, for whatever reason, and does not guard it so that others do not get hurt. If an accident happens, what is the punishment to be?
19. Verses 35-36 deal with a bull injuring another bull, and it dies. What is to happen? What are the extenuating circumstances that could result in a 100% restoration to a man for his dead animal?

Application

1. Do you suppose these were some of the issues that Moses had been dealing with when Jethro suggested he delegate some of the load to wise men who fear God, men of truth and character? How much easier would their job be now that there were standards in place?
2. Do you know anyone whose debt was so out of control that they became a slave to that debt for years? After this kind of servitude, what is the one thing that they might be very slow to do again. According to Romans 13:8, what is the only debt that we should have?
3. How has studying Exodus 21 revealed God's heart to you concerning the value he places on human life?
4. The Israelites had been slaves themselves; now they are free and others are under their care. If they are not careful, they too might become difficult taskmasters. In what way do you believe these judgments influenced the care of those under their authority?

5. Can you think of a situation where it would be helpful for you to know these laws and standards in order to make a proper ruling?
6. Even though male servants could be set free after 6 years, why would it not be good to free a female servant? How did their positions differ?
7. Placing a high value on someone else's property is very important. How do you show you value another's property? Can you think of ways we can instill this in a child's heart at an early age, so that they will grow up considering the outcome of their actions before they do something that might cost someone else?
8. Notice verses 12, 15, 16 and 17 begin with the words "anyone who...", but others such as verses 28-32 pay much more attention to the details and motives. This was all new to the Israelites who had come out of Egypt. Egypt was a land ruled by the word and whim of its Pharaoh. How comforting is it to know the law prior to difficult situations? Do our courts offer rulings like this today?
9. We have an expression that says "let the punishment fit the crime". Where do you suppose this idea came from? Do you believe it had anything to do with Exodus 21:23-25? What might an offended party have a tendency to want?
10. In light of all the laws we have looked at in this chapter, what higher ground are we to take as followers of Christ? Read Matthew 5:38-42.
11. What will this higher ground look like in our dealings with others?
Remember, these laws were not given as principles for retaliation, but as a standard for limiting retribution.
12. Do you have a situation in which you are clearly entitled to restitution, but you are considering forgiveness?
13. Why do you believe Jesus taught that we are to treat people with generosity and mercy rather than always demanding justice? What does the lost world think when they experience mercy, and they clearly should have gotten judgment?

- 14.** How have you seen of God's character in this chapter? How has this chapter helped you know him more intimately?

- 15.** What does God require of those in positions of authority? Look up Micah 6:8 to see exactly what the Lord requires of us. You may need to use the table of contents in the front of your Bible to locate this small Old Testament book. This is a great verse to memorize.