

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

10-7-20

Exodus 21

Commands regarding Hebrew Servants - Verses 1-11

¹ "These are the laws you are to set before them: ² "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. ³ If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. ⁴ If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. ⁵ "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' ⁶ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life. ⁷ "If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as male servants do. ⁸ If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her. ⁹ If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. ¹⁰ If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. ¹¹ If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

21:1 As we already know, slavery was common in the Middle East as far back as ancient Egypt. If God had simply ignored it, then there would have been no rules for their treatment and they could have treated them harshly with no rights. But since they did have rights and rules for their protection, it showed that God cared for them as well. However, this is often misconstrued for an endorsement of slavery, which it is not. God listed slave traders among the worst of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:10 (kidnappers/men stealers/slave traders).

21:2 The Hebrews, though freed from slavery, had slaves (or servants) themselves. A person could become a slave because of poverty, debt, or even crime. But Hebrew slaves were treated as humans, not property, and were allowed to work their way to freedom. The Bible acknowledges the existence of slavery but never encourages it.

21:1-11 It was voluntary. Why would anybody voluntarily agree to slavery? Obviously only as a last resort. Probably because of foolish life decisions or excessive borrowing, a person would get himself into a pit too deep to dig out of. The only recourse would be to voluntarily sell himself as a slave. He has no other possessions and nothing of value, so he sells the last thing he has of worth, himself.

21:2-11 Israelites could sell themselves as a slave/bond servant to have their debts covered, make a wage, have housing and be set free after six years. Foreigners could sell themselves as a slave/bond servant as well.

Commands regarding murder - Verses 12-14

¹² "Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. ¹³ However, if it is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen, they are to flee to a place I will designate. ¹⁴ But if anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and put to death.

21:12-14 God does differentiate between different types of murder. If a person murders someone else by accident in the heat of the moment, perhaps in a fight, then that person need not be executed. Most modern laws make similar distinctions between pre-meditated murder and manslaughter. This kind of situation could include things like two men fighting and in the fistfight one hits his head on a rock and dies or they pick up objects to fight with and hit the other in the head and he dies. Why does God make distinction? God is concerned not only with our actions, but also with our heart and our motivations. Planning out a murder shows a different level of hate. This law doesn't excuse manslaughter as the penalty for manslaughter is exile (something akin to prison since they couldn't leave the city of refuge.) This is still a hefty punishment. It is a reminder to always be careful. Don't engage in reckless or foolish behavior or fights. They could always end worse than you expect. One accident/mistake in the heat of the moment could alter the course of your life forever. Self-control is extremely important.

Commands regarding conflicts and quarreling - Verses 15-27

¹⁵ "Anyone who attacks their father or mother is to be put to death. ¹⁶ "Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession. ¹⁷ "Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death. ¹⁸ "If people quarrel and one person hits another with a stone or with their fist and the victim does not die but is confined to bed, ¹⁹ the one who struck the blow will not be held liable if the other can get up and walk around outside with a staff; however, the guilty party must pay the injured person for any loss of time and see that the victim is completely healed. ²⁰ "Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, ²¹ but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property. ²² "If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. ²³ But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. ²⁶ "An owner who hits a male or female slave in the eye and destroys it must let the slave go free to compensate for the eye. ²⁷ And an owner who knocks out the tooth of a male or female slave must let the slave go free to compensate for the tooth.

21:15-17 This is one of several OT laws that show how serious it is for children to be rebellious/hateful/disobedient to parents. If a child strikes his parents, it is worthy of death. I have seen children hitting their parents. This is yet another reminder that without grace there is no hope. Everybody has committed sins worthy of death. The world sometimes laughs at kids who hit their parents or say rude things thinking it is "cute" or "funny." This is inexcusable. We should never laugh at sin. Sin is never cute. Hitting parents is evil.

21:16 This verse tells us that stealing a person to sell them or any other reason, is a crime worthy of death. This is a great verse to share to skeptics who say that the Bible supports the slave trade. According to this passage, slave traders should all be executed. We can see that the world's punishments for crimes fall far short of God's punishments. The reason is perhaps that the world doesn't take sin as seriously as God does.

21:18-19 Law of restitution. A person is required to compensate the other party if a fight he is involved in keeps him from work. Many biblical laws contain principles for restitution. It is one area that modern law often neglects. Modern law will generally throw people in prison as punishment, but that doesn't actually help the victim.

21:20-21 This law gives certain rights and raises the slave's status from commonly accepted culture at that time. Generally masters could kill their slaves with no punishment. Here, they are not allowed to do so. The slaves are treated as a person (albeit a person who has given up certain rights when he sinned and was forced to sell himself as a slave.) It seems living for at least a day or two was evidence that the death wasn't caused by the master.

21:24-25 The "eye for eye" rule was instituted as a guide for judges, not as a rule for personal relationships or to justify revenge. This rule made the punishment fit the crime, thereby preventing the cruel and barbaric punishments that characterized many ancient countries. Jesus used this principle to teach us not to retaliate (Matthew 5:38-48). Judges, parents, teachers, and others who work with people must make wise decisions in order for discipline to be effective. A punishment too harsh is unfair, and one too lenient is powerless to teach. Ask God for wisdom before you judge.

Commands regarding animals - Verses 28-36

²⁸ "If a bull gores a man or woman to death, the bull is to be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. ²⁹ If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull is to be stoned and its owner also is to be put to death. ³⁰ However, if payment is demanded, the owner may redeem his life by the payment of whatever is demanded. ³¹ This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter. ³² If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull is to be stoned to death. ³³ "If anyone uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, ³⁴ the one who opened the pit must pay the owner for the loss and take the dead animal in exchange. ³⁵ "If anyone's bull injures someone else's bull and it dies, the two parties are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally. ³⁶ However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and take the dead animal in exchange.

21:28-32 This law illustrated the principle of *intent* and *neglect*. An owner of a man-killing ox could not be held guilty if the animal had no history of aggression towards people. Yet the animal must die, and the owner was forbidden to profit from the animal or its death. No one was to profit from or regard casually even accidental death. Yet, if an ox owner had an ox (or similar

animal) whom he knew to be aggressive and he failed to control the animal, he was guilty of murder and punished as such. The same principles were applied in the death of a minor. They were regarded as people with rights to respect as well as adults.

21:32 If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver: If a servant was killed under such circumstances, the price of restitution was thirty shekels of silver, which was considered the price of a slave. "Significantly, this was the same price Jesus was sold for when Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15).

21:33-36 These laws communicate the principle of responsibility for the consequences of an individual's actions upon another. The example given had to do with necessary restitution when the digging of a pit caused the death of an animal. "To a struggling Israelite farmer, fair payment for the death of an ox might mean the difference between life and death, or at least between freedom and slavery for debt."