

# The Book of Exodus

## Supplementary Laws

### Part I – Laws Pertaining to People

Text: Exodus 21:1-32

#### Introduction:

1. While foundational, the Ten Commandments were not the only laws God gave to His people.
2. Chapters 21 – 23 record numerous other commandments given to the nation of Israel.
3. They are divided into three sections; the first dealing with relationships between people.
4. These laws are classified as “judgments” because they were to govern the legal and judicial system of Israel.
5. Judges and magistrates were to be guided by these rules in rendering legal decisions.

#### I. Concerning Servants (Exodus 21:1-6)

- A. Slavery has existed throughout the history of the world.
  1. The Law of Moses did not ban slavery altogether.
  2. However, it did regulate and mitigate the treatment of slaves & servants.
- B. It must be understood that all slavery is not immoral or unjust.
  1. There are more types of slavery than the buying or selling of human beings.
  2. The word for ‘buy’ in this verse means, “To acquire, get, possess, or buy.”
  3. Under the Law of Moses, a person could become a slave because of debt (Lev. 25:39-43; cf. 2 Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:1-5; Matt. 18:25).
  4. A person could become a slave because of crime (Exo. 22:1-3; cf. Jud. 2:14).
  5. Modern prisoners are basically slaves of the state.
- C. Yet, if one who was a Hebrew became a slave, he was to be released after six years of services (cf. Deut. 15:1-18; 31:10).
  1. If single at the time of his enslavement, he alone would be released.
  2. If married, he and his family would be released.
  3. If he married while enslaved (to a woman provided by his master), then he alone would be freed.
  4. However, he had the right to choose to remain a servant and continue with his family.
  5. If he chose to do this, his ear would be “bored through with an awl” and the awl fastened to the doorpost of his master’s house.
  6. This signified a permanent attachment to his master’s household (cf. Deut. 15:17).
- D. It must be remembered that Hebrew slaves were to be treated with kindness and there were strong punishments for one who mistreated a slave.

#### II. Concerning Maidservants (Exodus 21:7-11)

- A. Also, at this time, parents had the right to sell their children into bondage.
- B. God’s Law sought to protect women who were placed in this difficult situation.
- C. A woman who was sold into bondage could be redeemed if no longer desired by her master.

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- D. If he had taken her to be his concubine, he must betroth her to his son or allow her freedom to be purchased.
- E. He must provide for her all that he would for his wife.
- F. If he failed to do these things, she could leave without price or consequence.

## III. Concerning Manslaughter

(Exodus 21:12-14)

- A. Verse 12 builds upon the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment – “Thou shalt not kill” – and adds the punishment – “Shall be surely put to death.”
- B. Yet, this principle of ‘capital punishment’ goes back to the beginning (Gen. 1:26-27; 4:10; 5:1; 9:6).
  - 1. This is a matter of justice with God (2 Kin. 9:26; Job 16:18; Rev. 6:10).
  - 2. It is also a foundational principle on which civil society is built and maintained.
- C. However, if a life was taken by accident, God made provision for the guilty party to be spared from death.
  - 1. Initially, it seems that the offender would flee to the altar (vs. 14).
  - 2. Eventually, God would appoint “cities of refuge” to which the offender must flee (Num. 35:11ff; Deut. 4:41-43; 19:1-13; Josh. 20:1-9).
- D. Even when accidental, the taking of human life was a serious occurrence.

## IV. Concerning One Who Smites Parents

(Exodus 21:15)

- A. This verse means exactly what it says.
  - 1. Obviously, it is not referring to infants or young children.
  - 2. However, one who has reached a state of maturity and treats his parents in this way demonstrates a dangerous and unnatural attitude of heart.
- B. This sentence was both a punishment for sin and protection of society (cf. Deut. 21:18-21; Prov. 30:11; 1 Tim. 1:9).

## V. Concerning Abductors

(Exodus 21:16)

- A. This verse condemns crimes such as kidnapping, abduction, and human trafficking.
  - 1. Remember the actions of Joseph’s brothers (Gen. 37:28; 40:15).
  - 2. There was also a spiritual danger in this act of separating an Israelite from his homeland.
- B. This law must be kept in mind in relation to law concerning slavery (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10).

## VI. Concerning One Who Curses Parents

(Exodus 21:17)

- A. The word for ‘curseth’ means, “To treat with contempt; to dishonor; to make of little account; to make despicable; to lightly esteem or treat as insignificant” (cf. Lev. 20:9; Deut. 27:16; Prov. 20:20; 30:17).
- B. This demonstrated a rebellious attitude of disrespect for parents, bloodline, and God.

## VII. Concerning Just Retribution

(Exodus 21:18-25)

- A. One who was injured in a fight became the responsibility of the one who hurt him.
  - 1. Since he was not guilty of murder, he did not face the death penalty.
  - 2. However, he was responsible for compensation for the time lost due to injury.
  - 3. And, he was responsible for the medical care received by the one injured.
- B. One who abused a slave and caused his or her death was to be avenged.

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- C. If the slave was only injured, then the owner's loss of time and work was considered punishment for his actions.
- D. If a woman who was with child was hurt, causing her child to be born, there were two cases in which punishment was demanded.
  - 1. If no harm came to the mother or the child, then a fine would be levied by the judges in accordance with the husband's wishes.
  - 2. If harm did come to either mother or child, then a just punishment was to be levied – even including death.
- E. The principle stated as “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” was not meant to encourage personal revenge or retaliation.
- F. This was to be determined in a court of law and the punishment carried out by legal officials (cf. Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21; Jud. 1:6-7; 1 Sam. 15:33).
- G. Jesus explained and expounded upon this in Matthew 5:38-42.

## VIII. Concerning One Who Injures a Servant (Exodus 21:26-27)

- A. A slave who was injured by his master, causing him to lose a tooth or the use of his eye, was to be set free.
  - 1. The eye represented the most precious of organs, the loss of which would be devastating.
  - 2. The tooth represented a loss of far less consequence, though still important.
- B. The purpose of these laws was to ensure just and kind treatment of servants.

## IX. Concerning Injury Caused by a Beast of Burden (Exodus 21:28-32)

- A. If an ox (or other domesticated animal) cause the death of a human being, the animal was to be put to death and his flesh not to be eaten.
- B. If the owner had been made aware of his animal's violent temperament, then he was held responsible.
  - 1. He was viewed as guilty of a capital offence and was subject to death.
  - 2. However, his life could be redeemed by a fine of money determined by the court.
- C. If the owner was not aware of the animal's dangerous disposition, he was not to be held accountable for its actions.
- D. If the animal killed another man's servant, then the price of a slave was to be given – 30 pieces of silver.