

After God spoke from the cloud to the nation, they pleaded with Moses to be the go-between. They wanted him to hear God's voice and tell them what He said. It was too frightening and overwhelming to hear it personally. So Moses entered the cloud and received the Book of the Covenant. It is recorded in chapters 21 through 23 as written down by Moses. "It is an application of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) specifically for the social context of Israel as a nation."⁴ Though laws in different cultures and nations may vary, they should be based on the moral absolutes of the Ten Commandments.

Commented [Paul Wall1]: John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 2:57

Many of these applications were in use in other nations in the East, but there are some major differences. The fact that similar laws have been discovered does not negate the inspiration; rather, it confirms that God was inspiring other nations to seek fairness and equity. (Acts 17:26-27)

Commented [Paul Wall2]: Acts 17:26-27 (ESV)
26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,
27 that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

The greatest difference, of course, is that this is not a covenant with a king and his conquered masses but with the King of the Universe and His chosen people. Obedience to the law is not merely submission to a conquering lord, but is, in fact, righteous living. (John 14:23)

Commented [Paul Wall3]: John 14:23 (NIV)
23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Some of the uniqueness of the laws of God included protection for the weak. Foreigners, women, and orphans had special provisions to keep the strong from taking advantage of them. God warns that He is the protector of the weak. (Exodus 22:22-24) Other cultures simply saw the weak as having little or no rights.

Commented [Paul Wall4]: Exodus 22:22-24 (NIV)
22 "Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan.
23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry.
24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

As you read through these laws, you might be tempted to think, as I did, that they are tedious rules for long ago. But as we look at these laws in their cultural setting, we can see that the background principles from the Ten Commandments are those that the most advanced societies adhere to today. The applications brought obedience to God and living a spiritual life into the everyday practical situations. We still struggle with some of these issues today.

The Book of the Covenant actually begins in chapter 20 verse 22 with laws about the altar. The people had just asked Moses to meet with God on their behalf. God's first set of instructions were how to have the people meet with God in a way that was not quite as intimidating as their encounter at Sinai. They were to meet Him at the altar. Instead of trembling before His manifest presence, they came with a sacrifice. The sacrifice pointed to a substitution that would take the punishment they deserved. It reminded them of the Passover Lamb through which they were saved from the final judgment on sin, which is death.

Of course, it was only a picture pointing to the Lamb of God, Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice. (John 1:29) Right at the beginning of the rules for living, God was pointing to the work He would do to make it possible for them to meet with Him without fear. It was to be at the altar of the cross where the justice of God was satisfied. (Romans 5:8-9)

Commented [Paul Wall5]: John 1:29 (NIV)
29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The next set of laws deals with slavery, or what would be better called indentured servitude. When someone could not pay their penalty in court, or if they were unable to pay their debts, they could get a no interest loan or sell six years of service to a fellow Israelite. A six-year contract would be made at half the price of hiring a person each day for the same amount of time. (Deuteronomy 15:18) They would receive the money in advance to pay their debt or fine and would receive room and board. When they finished their six years of service their master was required to set them up with enough provision to restart their life. It was kind of like a do over. (Deuteronomy 15:12-15) It was a win-win situation. The eventual goal was a prosperous master and a free and independent worker with new skills and a fresh start.

Commented [Paul Wall6]: Romans 5:8-9 (ESV)
8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Many people, and I include myself, have thought that the Bible authorized slavery in that culture and at that time. However, that just shows our ignorance of Scripture and culture. You see, in this same set of laws, the person that steals another human and sells them faces the death penalty. (Exodus 21:16) That means that every Israelite was serving according to their free will. You can't condone what we would call slavery on Biblical grounds. As a matter of fact, it was when slaves in Europe were allowed to take communion that slavery began to come under attack as inhumane and was soon outlawed.

Commented [Paul Wall7]: Deuteronomy 15:18 (ESV)
18 It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired servant he has served you six years. So the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

Commented [Paul Wall8]: Deuteronomy 15:12-15 (ESV)
12 "If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.
13 And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed.
14 You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.
15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.

Servants also retained certain rights while they served. If their master killed them, he forfeited his own life. If in the process of punishing the person for not fulfilling their duties the servant was injured in some permanent way, they were free from fulfilling the rest of the time they owed their master. If they came with their wife and/or children they left with them when their time was up. No other legal system in the world at that time gave servants these kind of rights.

Commented [Paul Wall9]: Exodus 21:16 (ESV)
16 "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

The modern application would be to respect the rights of workers and see that they are paid in a way that is both fair to the employer and the laborer. The employer should help the worker learn new skills to advance them. Employers should not take advantage of employees. Workers should have the right to human dignity. Severance should ideally be on agreeable terms with both parties.

Perhaps the most difficult part of these laws for us to relate to is the fact that women were treated differently. If a servant woman was given to another servant in marriage, she would not leave with him but had to remain with her

master. Some would point to this as the Bible endorsing chauvinism, but that is not the case. The culture of the day must be understood. Being a servant ensured the woman of support and security. To leave with a man who had previously failed in business and might fail again was not a happy proposition. If the man who had married her was successful, he could redeem her. This ensured that he could actually make a living so that the woman's basic needs could be met.

Some people found serving a household so beneficial or grew so attached to the family that they gave themselves in service to that home for life. We'll talk more about that at the end of the message.

Consider the benefits of this system. Each person could retain their dignity by paying their debts and not being forced to beg or sell their family property. While working for your master, you would learn better business practices and possibly new skills. When you left that home, you left with your dignity and ready to start again. Welfare in the form of charity was for those who were unable to work, not for able-bodied people. Charitable giving to those who were incapacitated was and still is considered by Jews to be one of the most righteous acts honored by God. (Psalm 112:9)

The applications to today are obvious. Today, many have found that they have to take a job at half of what they were making just to get by. This what the Old Testament servant was doing. **Better to retain your dignity by working at any job than to start taking handouts.** If you are able, you can and should work. Whatever it takes to pay what you owe must be done, even if it is humbling.

In our effort to be helpful we give too many outs for those who would avoid their commitments. Judges order a fine and the offended party never collects. Credit is extended and paid back at a fraction of the cost. People refuse to take a lower paying job and the government gives them a paycheck. Charity to those who have no other option is God's way, but handouts for the irresponsible is not!

I realize this is a very political statement in our time, but we have come to this passage at this time by God's design. Sometimes I'm asked to preach on a person's favorite political issue. Here at Wayside Bible Chapel, we go through the Scriptures one book at a time, verse by verse to see what God has to say to us today. When we get to a particular passage, I'll tell you what it says and you can decide if my application is faithful to the Word or not. Our goal is to faithfully interpret the passage in its original setting, then draw an honest application to our day whether we like what it says or not. (Hebrews 4:12)

The next section is on capital crimes. The first is execution for those who commit murder. The two words (murder and execution) are different in Hebrew. God

Commented [Paul Wall10]: Psalm 112:9 (ESV)
9 He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.

Commented [Paul Wall11]: Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)
12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

requires capital punishment for those who carry out a planned homicide. Where does the Bible stand on capital punishment? It demands it! Now you might have a question about the legal process or the humane way to execute the guilty, but there is no question as to whether or not God demands capital punishment (Genesis 9:5b-6) when two witnesses' testimony agrees. (Deuteronomy 17:6-7)

In the case of unintentional homicide, or what we would call involuntary homicide, God provided for an escape. The family of the person that died would try to avenge the death of their loved one. The person who accidentally killed the person could flee to one of the cities of refuge that were scattered throughout the land and find protection or he could flee to the altar in the tabernacle. (Numbers 35:6) However, if it was proven by a trial to be intentional, he was to be dragged out and executed.

The next capital crime must be seen in light of the language and culture. Anyone who curses or strikes father or mother is to be executed. I want to do a sermon series soon on Biblical authority. This is hard for us to accept because we don't understand that to dishonor those God has placed over us is to dishonor God. First, we need to understand that the word in Hebrew for "strike" is a violent attack such as attempted murder. It is completely the opposite of the fifth command to honor your parents. (Exodus 20:12)

Cursing your parents was also a much more serious matter than we see it today. It meant to disown them. It was usually in the case of when a person refused to care for their parents in their old age. To destroy the family was to destroy the nation. Jesus referred to this crime in Matthew 15:3-6. It was selfishly denying parental support, letting them starve.

The third case requiring capital punishment is kidnapping and selling the person as a slave. This shows how adamantly God was opposed to what we call slavery. It is reminiscent of what Joseph's brothers did to him, and what Egypt did to the nation of Israel. (Genesis 37:26-27)

The next crimes covered involve personal injury. We won't go through all the laws and what was equitable but some of the cases are like reading headlines of a modern newspaper. Remember the dog attack in San Francisco that killed a man? The people who owned the dog were not charged until it was discovered that the dog had injured someone before. That's covered in the Book of the Covenant. If you injure someone, do you also have to pay for their loss of income? It's covered. Is the one that caused the injury liable for hospital bills? It's covered! What if you injure a pregnant woman and her baby dies. It's covered.

Commented [Paul Wall12]: Genesis 9:5-6 (ESV)
5 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.
6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Commented [Paul Wall13]: Deuteronomy 17:6-7 (ESV)
6 On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.
7 The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

Commented [Paul Wall14]: Numbers 35:6 (ESV)
6 The cities that you give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit the manslayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities.

Commented [Paul Wall15]: Exodus 20:12 (ESV)
12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Commented [Paul Wall16]: Matthew 15:3-6 (ESV)
3 He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?
4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Who ever reviles father or mother must surely die.'
5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

Commented [Paul Wall17]: Genesis 37:26-27 (ESV)
26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?
27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him.

"The law of God imposed strict penalties on anyone who harmed an unborn child. It treated the injury of an unborn child the same way it treated the injury of any other human being."² Where that leaves us with today's abortion issue is obvious. I didn't write it, God did through Moses. And regardless of our inclinations or preferences, our standard should be the unchanging Word of God. His justice is the only true justice.

Commented [Paul Wall18]: Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Exodus: Saved for God's Glory.

The laws and their sentences imply that when we are out of control, we are responsible. We can't get out of it by saying it was an accident. We chose to lose control through rage or drugs and therefore we are responsible for the outcome. That is God's sense of justice.

These things could be taken right out of our headlines. The really sad part of this study is that it is no longer politically correct to refer to the Bible when making laws or enforcing sentences. It has become more popular to refer to European or UN guidelines. There are forces at work in America that are working to erase our Christian heritage. There was a day when Senators and Justices quoted the Bible to back their opinion. We now ignore the wisdom of Scripture to our own peril. (Psalm 119:105)

Commented [Paul Wall19]: Psalm 119:105 (ESV)
105 NUN Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Finally, let me address briefly the eye for an eye saying. We've all heard the "eye for an eye and tooth for tooth" Scripture. Again, if we don't understand the context and application it can sound barbaric. The purpose of the expression was to limit the amount of retribution to that of the crime. It was a way of saying the punishment should fit the crime. It should not be more, but neither should it be less. They did not take the expression literally, as is seen throughout these laws, but interpreted it as justice needing to be served. To slap a person on the hand for theft is too lenient. To cut off the hand for the same crime is too harsh.

I'd like to close by returning to the issue of servants. In some cases, a person who sold them self as a slave decided that at the end of their six years of service that they did not want to go free. It really isn't that hard to imagine. If you struggled to make it on your own but thrived under the direction of a master, you might want to stay as a part of his household.

Commented [Paul Wall20]: Deuteronomy 15:16-17 (ESV)
16 But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you,
17 then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same.

In some cases the servant actually fell in love with the family he served and did not want to leave. He may have married another slave and not be confident that he could make it on his own to redeem her. He would then ask his master if he could serve him for life. The master would then call for the elders of the village to come to his home and pierce the ear of the servant with an awl on the doorpost of the home. (Deuteronomy 15:16-17)

Commented [Paul Wall21]: Exodus 29:20 (ESV)
20 and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar.

The act was rich with symbolism. It meant the man's ear was now to be attentive to the master of the home to serving his commands. (Exodus 29:20)

The servant's own desires would have to come second. He now had a home and provision for life. It was a form of security, but it was also a lifetime of service.

The author of Hebrews says that this was true of Jesus' relationship with the Father. (Hebrews 10:5) Jesus' ear was opened to the Father above His own desires. He served for life. The Father's will always came first. When the Apostle Paul and other Apostles called themselves bondservants, they were saying it was true of them too.

Now, let me ask you, how is it going trying to make it out there on your own? Do you love your Master? Maybe your spouse is His servant and you realize that will never change. How would you like the security of being in the family of God? Think about that for a moment.

It comes with one major demand. Your ear must belong to your Master. You have to place your desires second. But oh what a loving and generous Master Jesus is! And what security! Do you really want to go out there and try to make it on your own? Wouldn't you be much better off as servant of the Living God?

There is one thing you have to confess: "I love my Master and I do not want to go free." He is not hard to love. In fact, His love begets love in us. (1John 4:19) And as far as freedom goes, what you thought was freedom, well, lets just say it's highly overrated, if not an outright lie. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32) What do you say? Shall we call the elders?

If that is true of you this morning, let us take this commitment as seriously as life and death. Take hold of your right earlobe Place it on the gate of heaven. Are you ready for the awl? Let's say it together. "I love my Master Jesus, and I do not want to go free. I choose to be a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Questions

- 1 What is the Book of the Covenant and its purpose?
- 2 What were these laws based on?
- 3 What is the difference with other laws of that time?
- 4 To what does the first set of laws pertain? Why is it first?
- 5 Does the Bible condone slavery?
- 6 Why are men and women treated differently?
- 7 What are the benefits of the system?
- 8 What crimes required capital punishment?
- 9 Explain capital punishment of a child.
- 10 What kind of crimes are covered in the next set of laws?
- 11 Are you a bondservant?

Commented [Paul Wall22]: Hebrews 10:5 (ESV)
5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; (note that the quote from Ps 40:6-8 in the Septuagint reads, "my ear you have opened" instead of

Commented [Paul Wall23]: 1 John 4:18-19 (ESV)
18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.
19 We love because he first loved us.

Commented [Paul Wall24]: John 8:32 (ESV)
32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."