

FEBRUARY 5

Exodus 21:22-23:13

The laws that God is giving here may seem varied and random, but there is a pattern. The laws here do not spell out every possible situation, but they do provide a framework of situations that you could use to make applications to other similar, but unmentioned, events. We see something like this on TV in courtroom dramas. The hot-shot lawyer will find a case like, "Smith vs. the State of Nevada," and use that judgment to help decide a case that has some similar aspects.

It seems that the theme of this first block is restitution and punishment in case of a death.

Exodus 21:22-36

Vs. 22-25 Notice that the baby is born prematurely. Some translations say "miscarry," but the Hebrew has a separate word for miscarriage. This is an injury that causes premature birth. If the child lives, no problem. If either the mother or child is harmed, the father sets the restitution and judges determine if this is fair. If the woman is injured, the penalty will be the same as the injury. If either mother or child died, then death is the penalty.

This is the first mention of the famous law of retribution. Notice that it actually limits what can be done to a person in judgment. Life for life is clear, but the others say that you cannot go beyond duplicating the injury. This limited the punishment. If someone broke your tooth, you couldn't kill them, maim them or take two teeth. It makes it clear too, that this was overseen by the town judges or elders. This wasn't something that took place privately in an alley.

Vs. 26-27 This law gives a slight addition to the law of retribution in the case of a slave. As in the law above, this does not seem to be premeditated violence, but someone losing their mind and lashing out. Not only would the slave owner lose his eye or his tooth, but he would also lose the slave.

Vs. 28-36 These three situations have to do with restitution where animals are inflicting harm or are harmed by carelessness.

V. 30 What strikes me here is that in the first situation, the man who owned the ox was liable for death if he knew the animal was dangerous. Yet in this case, the judges and family of the victim could elect not to kill the man since he himself didn't do the killing, but instead, demand a ransom payment of some kind.

You'll notice in many of these laws that God is sowing thoughts and giving traditions that will point to Christ's sacrifice for us. We are ransomed by His blood.

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

V. 33 People were responsible to be careful for others and their property.

Exodus 22

Vs. 1-17 This section seems to be laws to clarify the eighth commandment, *Do not steal*. Notice that this section hangs together because each block begins with *If*. Verse 18 begins a different kind of thought.

V. 1 This sets the theme of this section. This is like the law of retribution for loss or theft.

Vs. 2-3 Notice that the death of the thief was to be avoided. The burglary at night left the owner defenseless in defending himself. The message is pretty clear. Stuff is not a reason to kill someone. Let it go.

If the thief was caught but spent everything, he was to be sold into slavery to repay what was stolen.

V. 4 This reflects back on v. 1. If the thief was caught and still had the stolen animals, he gave back the animals he stole and an animal for each one he stole.

Vs. 5-6 Again, carelessness resulting in loss had to be paid for.

Vs. 7-13 There were no banks, self-storage rooms or doggy and cattle hotels back then. If you went on a trip, you had to leave your stuff in the care of someone. These laws make sure that the property or animal was not lost as a result of the caretaker.

Vs. 14-15 And then what about borrowing your neighbor's ox? If the neighbor damaged it, you made full restitution, but if the owner was there either using it to plow or pull out a stump or watching it being done, the owner had responsibility by his ownership to supervise and keep things safe.

Again, these were general situations given to give a baseline in more complex or unexpected situations. I'm sure if the owner was there, but suddenly the borrowing neighbor did something bizarre and the animal died, there were other laws to make sure there was restitution.

Vs. 16-17 It seems that the issue in this section is "restitution for damaging someone's property or means of revenue." You might come up with a better title or idea. Back in that day, livestock carried things and moved things and plowed things. You can understand the money, property and livestock, but what is that section about the virgin doing there?

First, when a family married off their virgin daughter, they were given money, cattle or something, the *bride-price*. If a girl lost her virginity, the family was robbed of the *bride-price*. Virginity, and the implied faithfulness and virtue thereof, was prized in that day.

Notice, that she is "seduced" and not a willing participant. The girl is not looked on as being responsible. The guy is responsible. Back in that day, a girl could be engaged as a young teen. Some say that Mary, Jesus' mother, could have been as young as 14 or 15 when she was betrothed to Joseph. In this case, I suppose if she was at a feast or celebration and someone was feeding her wine this could happen. (BTW, when a guy says, "Can I buy you a drink?" that is not a gift, it is a speculative investment.) In any case, this guy was a premeditative predator and the girl is not seen as being of age or maturity to fend off the influence.

The penalty was not only the bride-price, but marriage, unless the guy was such a jerk that the father couldn't stand thinking of his little girl being hitched to him or having him in the family. Whatever you get from this episode, marriage is seen as the proper context for sex.

Vs. 18-20 So what is these warnings doing here? Generally speaking it seems to be concluding the previous section. If there was an unknown theft or if there was need for prosperity or for information, they were to go to God, not to other sources. The people were to depend on God.

V. 18 Remember when Joseph was testing his brothers in Genesis 44:15, he said that he discovered their "theft" by divination. Joseph didn't really divine anything. He said that to conceal his identity. Divination is how you did things back then. You hired an occultist to see an event or tell you the future. You can see how this would be used as a way to make decisions or find out things. God wanted them to come to Him and use the law to decide. In a short time we'll see God give the people a method for judgment, the Urim and the Thummim, by which they could find out almost anything. They were to depend on God only.

V. 19 Baal worship was a way to obtain fertility and fruit in your fields and livestock. Sexual intercourse with cult prostitutes was part of this worship, as was having intercourse with animals. You wonder how VD was introduced to mankind? I'm not a doctor, but this would be a safe guess.

V. 20 Especially in pagan worship, you worshipped in order to get something. God was the One they were to seek.

Vs. 21-27 Over and over it is mentioned in the NT that loving your neighbor was the fulfilling of the law. These laws regarding the defenseless also have something to do with finance and prosperity.

Vs. 21-24 They might be tempted to take advantage of aliens, widows and children, working them for next to nothing, feeding them little, because there was no one to protect them. That still happens today.

Vs. 25-27 Even in lending money to these kinds of people, you couldn't make interest. Nor could you hold as collateral anything they needed for daily life and well-being.

V. 28 At the heart of the matter was their respect for God and those God put in authority to keep law and order. Just as a note here, Paul quotes this sarcastically in Acts 23:3-5. Paul was saying that he didn't know the high priest was the high priest because the people hated him and made jokes about his corruptness. The fact that they spoke evil of the high priest proved he was not a ruler of the people. Please tell me you got that.

Vs. 29-30 The people were to see themselves completely in God's care. Blessing came from Him; therefore, they were to be quick to give Him what He requested in these laws. Also, these tithes were used for the poor and to feed the priest and Levites who cared for the people.

V. 31 They were to see themselves so completely in God's care that they didn't need to eat road kill. They could trust God for His provision and walk on by.

Exodus 23:1-13

This section looks like there is more emphasis on "love your neighbor," but there is still a sense of commerce and well-being. These people lived directly from the land, and often from "hand to mouth." God is training them and teaching them to depend on Him. He will take care of them with His love so they can relax and show love to others.

Vs. 1-3 This is the ninth commandment; but again, what did you gain by lying and bearing false witness? It was often for financial advantage or personal well-being. Notice here they couldn't be *partial to a poor man*. Surely the rich or the thrifty had something to spare. Again, that is the financial aspect of what is implied in this section on truth. Justice was always to be just.

Vs. 4-5 This is not only "love your enemy," but his life and livelihood would be at risk losing an animal. God brings justice and vindication. We "play God," not by vengeance or looking the other way, but by showing His love.

Vs. 6-9 Faith in God gives courage to be just and fair. There is no need to oppress the poor or needy, or to watch it happen. Notice then, that there would be no need to take a bribe or pervert justice.

Vs. 10-13 This is the first mention of the Sabbatical year. This will loom large in Israel's history, but once we are past Deuteronomy it will become hidden and forgotten, until Jeremiah. It looks like Israel never, under any king, celebrated the Sabbath year. Here, it is mentioned as to how it related to the poor. The poor were free to gather food for a day or two but not harvest. This would have been different than the general provision given later that landowners were always to leave something in the corners of their fields so the poor could find food. In this case, the poor could wander into the fields and take what they found growing for the entire growing year.

Even more than the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year reflected a deep trust and dependence on God. "Can I relax and trust and not work for a day? Sure." "Can I relax and trust and not sow or harvest for a year?" They never obeyed this one. But image trusting God and having the year off!

Although some of the laws look social and simply humane, God wanted the people to see them as coming from Him so that the message behind the laws and the motivation to obey was, "You are my people. Love Me and love your neighbor." As Jesus says later, loving God and your neighbor sum up the law. As disciples, we are consecrated to God. We belong to Him to live for Him as lights in the world. For those in the western world, obeying government laws, as it says in Romans 13, should be easy for us because we know why we're here. Loving our neighbor to show them the love we have found is our mission, born out of our love and appreciation for Jesus saving and calling us to Himself and to His service.

Matthew 24:1-28

Vs. 1-2 Jesus is talking about the immediate judgment of Israel and Jerusalem under Titus in 70 A.D. The disciples now knew this was coming. This launches them into asking Jesus what the *close (end) of the age* would look like.

Vs. 3-28 *The Mount of Olives*, directly across from Jerusalem, would have given this discourse a great vantage point to view the city. It also gave it a great name, "The Olivet Discourse."

V. 3 Notice that the disciples ask Jesus about the *close of the age*. The *close of the age* is what Jesus is talking about here, not what will happen in 70 A.D. It will be the time of the Tribulation of the Jews that will precede the second coming of Christ and the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth in Jerusalem.

Vs. 4-8 These are the days leading up to the Tribulation. There will be confusion and questioning. Jesus describes these as the pains before the birth. Notice that there will be deception and people claiming to be Christ.

Vs. 9-14 This would be the first part of the Tribulation. It will be a time of disaster on earth, and therefore, people will be looking for Christ. This means that the Bible will be used and people will have some idea of what is happening.

Even during this awful time, the earth will be reached by the proclamation of the gospel. By whom? By the 144,000 Jewish preachers from Revelation. Israel will rise and fulfill its ministry.

Vs. 9-10 During this time of disaster and hardship on the earth, the heart of man will instinctively know that God is responsible and the followers of Christ will be *hated by all nations*. Imagine that. Since it will not be popular or cool to be a Christian, many "believers" will *fall away* and will *betray* and *hate* other, true, believers. It is a way that the Lord will reveal those who actually belong to Him. How foolish we are to think that the mark of a disciple is anything other than bearing our cross of death with a heart of love and joy, following our Lord into the harvest.

Vs. 15-28 *The abomination of desolation* refers to the event where a man, the antichrist, will come into the rebuilt temple, stop the worship, set up a desecrating image, and proclaim himself to be god. At that point in time, there will be 3.5 years of tribulation left; and at this point, all heck will break loose on Israel as a nation, and on all of those who have become disciples of Christ. During this time, it will get very desperate, having greater deceiving signs, more destruction and death; and when it gets darkest, Jesus returns. The sign of Jesus' coming will be so pronounced and obvious that all men will see it regardless of where they are on the earth.

Vs. 27-28 refers to the appearance of *the Son of Man* in the heavens. If someone were to ask, "where is the body (corpse)," the answer was to look up to the circling "eagles" (vultures). Jesus was telling His disciples that the question as to where the Christ was would only be answered one way, "Look up."

As disciples, we know that there is great judgment coming and this earth will get wrecked. We work now realizing this is coming. Things will not get better; they will get worse. We who are saved will be taken before that time, but others will go through the Tribulation. Jesus says the

harvest is white; but there won't always be time to harvest for us, so we follow Him now, every day, reaching out to the lost, making disciples, who make disciples.

Especially in election years, we need to remember we are not called or commissioned to obsess about our political situation. We are to work in the harvest as the storm clouds are gathering on the horizon.

Psalm 29

The most natural way to witness is to be overcome by God. Count as precious the love of Christ and His payment and deliverance and forgiveness and gift to you, and it comes out of you. Work with the lost in the harvest, and see what you have that you take for granted as you strain in prayer to God for the salvation of others; and you will find praise and gratitude to God becoming heartfelt and natural.

If you read this slowly, looking for clues to the structure, this beautiful psalm is also a good lesson in studying the Bible.

Vs. 1-2 This section is marked by the word *ascribe*. What does that mean?

Vs. 3-9 Notice the word *voice* - the Word of God.

V. 10 He *sits enthroned*. Cool! Think of the first lines of the Lord's Prayer.

V. 11 Amen.

Proverbs 7:6-23

One of the things that is interesting in reading the Proverbs at this speed, daily, is that you notice how often Solomon is hitting on this theme. Did you ever notice this before this year? I guess God is really, really, really saying, "Watch Out!" Stay away from the willing woman. Beware of sexual adventure. Unplug the computer. If you're married, make enjoyment with one another your hobby and passion. If you need to be married, lay it before the Lord, submit to Him, make Him your heart's desire and begin asking God how to seek for a marriage partner. Ask Him where you can get involved in the harvest, and as He leads you toward that person, focus on the harvest now. Don't wait.

Vs. 8-9 Notice that this man is already "had" because of the openness of his own heart. It isn't the woman or the website that is the ultimate problem. She has him here.

Vs. 10-21 Hollywood!

Vs. 22-23 We think that God is overstating the case, yet our world of leaders, political and spiritual, is a landscape filled with corpses. And each of these intelligent people walked to their demise as the fool in v. 7. When will we learn?