

## Exodus 21

(Exodus 21:1) "Now these *are* the judgments which you shall set before them:

Remember back in Chapter 18 when Moses appointed judges to assist him with the various disputes that would arise in the camp?

[Exodus 18:25](#) And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

### Let's start with some terminology:

**“Commandments”**: This usually refers to the comprehensive list of laws or body of laws given by the Lord in the Books of Moses. This is also the Hebrew term often used when the Lord spoke directly in the Old Testament.

Many observant Jews use the word “law” instead of “laws”. It embodies all of the laws and commandments given by God through Moses. This is most likely how James viewed it:

[James 2:10-11](#) For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

**“Statutes”** : According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, this word means “statute, prescription, rule, law, regulation” and can refer to laws of nature or what is allocated, rationed, or apportioned to someone. For example:

[Jeremiah 5:22](#) Do you not fear Me?' says the LORD. 'Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, Yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.

[Jeremiah 31:35-36](#) Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts *is* His name): (36) "If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, *Then* the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever."

**“Rules”**: A judicial verdict or formal decree. In the Law of Moses, some of the legal types of rules would fall under this category.

**“Statutes/Commands”** This refers to a particular law related to a festival or ritual, such as Passover ([Exodus 12:14](#)), the Days of Unleavened Bread ([Exodus 12:17](#)), or the Feast of Tabernacles ([Leviticus 23:41](#)).

All four of these Hebrew words are used throughout the writings of Moses to refer to commands from God **to be obeyed by God's people**. Distinctions are sometimes made regarding one word from the other, yet **the overall principle is one of obedience to all that the Lord commands**, whether it's a general command, a prescribed law, a legal verdict, or the keeping of a religious festival or ritual.

**The second point that needs to be made is one that we spoke about last week: the Letter of the Law vs the Spirit of the Law. I'll read some of the NT verses that show the distinct**

**Romans 2:28-29** For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; (29) but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and **circumcision *is that of the heart, in the Spirit***, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

**Romans 7:5-6** For when we were in the flesh, the sinful **passions which were aroused by the law** were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. (6) But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should **serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.**

**2 Corinthians 3:2-6** (2) You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; (3) clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, **written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is, of the heart.*** (4) And we have such trust through Christ toward God. (5) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, **but our sufficiency *is* from God,** (6) **who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

**The third point is in regard to culture and the time when these laws were given.**

Remember, this was 1400+ years before the time of Jesus and therefore 3400+ years before today. The Law was given to the Israelites before they entered promised land. It was a middle eastern culture with different perspectives on people, especially women. However, God gave the Law so that people would know how to properly behave in a family, tribe, in a nation and even as a group of people who were called out to be a holy nation. (Gee...that seems to apply to us as well.... **1 Peter 2:9** But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Have you ever noticed how much ink was used to pen all of the ways God expected Christians to behave? How many times did Paul admonish, rebuke or correct a church over its behavior? And, if truth be told, much of that teaching was based on the OT Law (but reinterpreted based on the New Covenant and the giving of the Holy Spirit).

We learned last week that we are not under the Law of Moses but under the Grace of God. We learned that the Law was a tutor (or school master) whose end/goal was to bring us to Christ. I believe that in a spiritual way, that is still true. And by spiritual, I mean "Holy Spirit-led". The Holy Spirit will lead us into ALL TRUTH including the truth of our on-going battle with sin in our flesh. He will guide us to confess our sins which will lead Him Who is faithful, to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (**1 John 1:9**)

As we read these chapters of laws, we will, with the help of the Holy Spirit, attempt to discern what God was trying to teach the Israelites and how we might apply these things to our lives today.

(**Exodus 21:2**) If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and **in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.** (**Exodus 21:3**) If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he *comes in* married, then his wife shall go out with him. (4) If his master has given him a wife, and she

has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. (5) But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' (6) then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

These servants, a.k.a., bondservants were men who owed a debt they could not pay or was in extreme poverty. Therefore, they served their “master” for 6 years and be let free in the seventh year. If the bondservant did not wish to be let free, he would serve his master forever. NOTE, this was for the Children of Jacob.

Today, we do not see this arrangement. But we all have worked for someone or some company or have had employees of our own. The principal being presented is fairness of the employer and an attitude of humility of the worker.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century there were still masters and bondservants. The issue may have arisen where both were worshipping in the same church – side by side, equals in the sight of God! So, Paul taught:

**Ephesians 6:5-9** Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; (6) not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, (7) with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, (8) knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. (9) And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

**(Exodus 21:7)** “And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. (8) If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. **(Exodus 21:9)** And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. (10) If he takes another *wife*, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. (11) And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without *paying* money.

The selling of a daughter was actually for marriage. It involved a bride-price between the fathers. Look at the care of God gave the woman. She could not be given to a foreigner because the father or son were deceitful in their arrangements. If the husband marries another, he has to treat the first wife (or second) as lessor – for she was not deemed lessor in the sight of God. Just because God never condoned multiple wives, doesn't mean He approved of it! He allowed it to protect the unmarried woman who might suffer abuse at the hand of her family or father.

**(Exodus 21:12)** "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. (13) However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered *him* into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

This wasn't a new law; it was just codified in the Mosaic Law. It first was given by God to Noah:

[Genesis 9:5-6](#) Surely for your lifeblood I will demand *a reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. (6) "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

[Numbers 35:9-12](#) Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (10) "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, (11) then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. (12) They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.

This is a difficult subject. I personally believe in capital punishment. It may not deter someone else from murdering a person or person, but it will guarantee that the murderer will never do it today. It might be a deterrent if it was applied more swiftly instead of years. But God views it as taking the life of a person created in His own image!

[\(Exodus 21:14\)](#) "But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die. (15) "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death . . . So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel. ([Num 35:31](#); [Num 35:33-34](#))

It was a common practice of the pagans to hide under an altar of a god so that mercy may be given.

Striking a father and mother was in violation of the "Honor Your father and mother commandment". The person who would do such a thing would most likely go on and do something worse!

[\(Exodus 21:16\)](#) "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.

This is true slavery. Not bond servanthood. The person being kidnapped and sold is also created in the image of God.

[\(Exodus 21:17\)](#) "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

Same as above.

[\(Exodus 21:18\)](#) "If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but is confined to *his* bed, (19) if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck *him* shall be acquitted. He shall only pay *for* the loss of his time, and shall provide *for him* to be thoroughly healed.

(Exodus 21:20) "And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. (21) Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he *is* his property.

Here the master is punished. How, we are not told. It was up to the judge to determine the punishment.

(Exodus 21:22) "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges *determine*.

The pregnant women may be an innocent bystander. If her injuries cause the birth of the child, both the husband and a judge will assign punishment.

(Exodus 21:23) But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life, (24) eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, (25) burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

While this does refer back to verse 22, the principal is not equality but restraint. The flesh wants its ounce plus a pound more. God says "No; you must not take more than was taken from you", that is, only the loss itself is to be compensated.

(Exodus 21:26) "If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. (27) And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.

It's a bit different for the master-slave relationship. Adam Clark commented:

"If this did not teach them *humanity*, it taught them *caution*, as one rash blow might have deprived them of all right to the future services of the slave; and this self-interest obliged them to be cautious and circumspect."

Now, the remaining verses speak of fairness and equity of various things that may happen in a shepherding society.

(Exodus 21:28) "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox *shall be* acquitted. (29) But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. (30) If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. (31) Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him. (32) If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

(Exodus 21:33) "And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, (34) the owner of the pit shall make *it* good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead *animal* shall be his. (35) "If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead *ox* they shall also divide. (36) Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.

In this chapter we see God putting restraints on people's fleshly natures. We see him caring for the slave and for the master; we see him caring for the woman and the man who are betrothed or married. We see him caring for the animals and their owners. He has built in an abundance of fairness in restitution to try to curb vengeful spirits.

God is the author of right and wrong. The Law was given to show people the difference between them in various situations. While the specific regional or cultural issues facing the people of that time are not always relevant to our time and cultures, the general principles of restitution, fairness and punishment are the same because since we have been on this earth, we are still the same sinners as always.

Only God can decide what is right or wrong. God created "morality" – it didn't evolve over time. God loved His creation so much that He taught us the dangers of sin and its affect on our relationships with others and also our relationship with Him. Both relationships can be broken. We have witnessed the severing of our relationship with God even in our public institutions and the affects of that on our country.

The problem seems to be that if we focus on the Law we lose focus on our **inabilities** to adhere to it. If, as we have learned, we truly can't obey all of the Law, then how are we to obey the Law of Christ which most people agree are "love God and love others"? I think many Christians fail at these two as much as the Jews failed at their Law as embodied in the 10 commandments.

So, in failing to obey any or all law, what's left? Jesus. His sacrifice caused His righteousness, His Holiness, His Justification, His Sanctification, His Forgiveness, His Righteousness to be imputed to us who abide in the True Vine. Our abiding is by the faith OF Jesus who sustains.

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (23)** Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(24)** He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*.

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (4)** I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, **(5)** that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, **(6)** even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, **(7)** so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, **(8)** who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(9)** God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.