

Book of Exodus

Lesson 13

Chapters 22

Part 9 - Theft

Exodus 22:1 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. 2 "If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. 3 "But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. 4 "If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.

An ox was valuable to the family. Its primary use was to plow the field and to haul the grain and supplies. If a thief killed the ox, the penalty was five oxen in retribution. In the case of a stolen but dead sheep, the penalty was four sheep.

The LORD made the judgment in this passage that if the thief was killed during the robbery, the killer was blameless. However, there is a twist in this passage. In the next verse it says, "**But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account.**" In other words, if the thief is killed at night when he cannot be recognized, then the killer is innocent; however, if the theft occurred during the daylight hours, when the thief could be identified in order to be tracked down, then, the killer of the thief was guilty of murder.

A poor thief had no excuse for committing a crime. If caught stealing, but, with no ability to repay the restitution for the crime, the thief could be sold to cover the debt. As laid out before in the beginning of this ordinance, the period of slavery could not last longer than six years if he was an Israelite. If the thief still had the animal, the penalty for a stolen ox was ten oxen and the penalty for a stolen sheep was eight sheep.

Instructions Concerning Property

Part 10 - The Field or Vineyard

Exodus 22:5 "If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed *bare* and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.

Allowing your own cattle to graze on someone else's land without permission is no different from any other theft. In repayment, the guilty party must allow the best of his own fields to be grazed in return when that land had recovered. The restitution for this crime is most likely field for field.

Part 11 – The Fire and the Field

Exodus 22:6 "If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field *itself* is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution.

A fire in the field can bring hardship to a family for several years. The destruction of grain threatened the livelihood the first year in food resources. If the seed grain had not been stored from the field to plant the next year, then that year was also in jeopardy.

Part 12 – Money or Goods in Trust

Exodus 22:7 "If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep *for him*, and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double.⁸ "If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property.

Neighbors are often trusted to care for the possessions of a neighbor. As a result of this kind gesture, the LORD saw fit to handle issues that might arise. In this case, the penalty for a thief who stole property in trust would be to repay double. If the thief was not found, then the trustee was to stand before a judge to determine if he was the mystery thief. Surely there must have been some latitude in this matter, depending on the relationship between the neighbors which would determine if a trustee would stand before the judge.

Part 13 – Breach of Trust

Exodus 22:9 "For every breach of trust, *whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,'* the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.

As indicated here, it can be assumed that even the best of neighbors can find themselves at odds over a breach of trust at some time. In that case, both neighbors must stand before the judge. The judge will then determine that the guilty party will pay the penalty at twice the value of the loss.

Part 14 – Care of Animals

Exodus 22:10 "If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep *for him*, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking,¹¹ an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them, that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept *it*, and he shall not make restitution.¹² "But if it is actually stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner.¹³ "If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces.

Animals are animals and they have their own desires and whims. Even with the best of care in the trust of a neighbor, animals would roam or perhaps even die. In these cases, the LORD provided for the loss and found the trustee guiltless. The only exception was if the animal was stolen. In that case, the penalty has already been addressed in Exodus 21:28 – 22:4.

Part 15 – Things Borrowed

Exodus 22:14 "And if a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution.¹⁵ "If its owner is with it, he shall not make restitution; if it is hired, it came for its hire.

This part of the judgment can be understood this way; if you borrow someone's tool and break it, you must replace it! If you borrow an ox to work your field and it dies, you must replace it. However, if the owner brings his tools or animals to do work for you and they are damaged or die while he is working on your property, you are not required to replace it because it was under the owner's care.

Instructions Concerning Virgins

Part 16 – Seduction of Virgin

Exodus 22:16 "And if a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife. ¹⁷ "If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins.

A sexual relationship between a man and a woman makes the two one flesh and therefore married. As such the dowry must be paid for his new wife to her father. The dowry was a financial security payment held by the father for the care of the bride in case the groom failed to provide for her, forsook her or died. The amount of the dowry was dependent on the custom of the day and changed through time as inflation occurred. However, while they were in the wilderness the dowry was fifty shekels of silver according to Deuteronomy 22:29. After this judgment was recorded, all ancient societies began to follow the practice.

The father did not have to accept the marriage and let his daughter go. In that case, the father had to redeem the daughter by paying the man the customary dowry.

Instruction Concerning Sorceress

Part 17 - Sorceress

Exodus 22:18 "You shall not allow a sorceress to live.

A sorceress was a woman who professed to have the power to communicate with the dead and look into the future through the use of evil spirits. This practice falls within the scope of idolatry, but because it invokes the intentional communication with evil spirits and the presumption and publication that the sorceress actually had the supernatural power to do so, the death penalty was mandatory.

Instruction Concerning Human/Animal Relations

Part 18 - Bestiality

Exodus 22:19 "Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death."

Sexual relationships with animals will later be named as an abomination to the LORD. Here, He judges that those who enter into this practice must face the death penalty. Why does the LORD present this judgment? Among the Egyptians and Canaanites, bestiality was common; the LORD did not want the Israelites to enter into this practice.

Instruction Concerning False Worship

Part 19 - Sacrifice to other Gods

Exodus 22:20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed.

Here, the LORD imposes the death penalty on those who worship “any god” other than Himself. Surely this judgment will be ignored during the years of the divided kingdom but will ultimately be enforced by the LORD. In a careful reading of the history of the exile of the Northern Kingdom to Assyrian we find that only the righteous were taken away to be protected. In Assyria, the righteous became renowned in their new home and politically influential in the region. On the other hand, the unrighteous were destroyed in their homeland. In the same manner, the righteous of the Southern Kingdom were taken into exile in Babylon and protected as the LORD elevated Daniel to second in command of the Babylonian Kingdom whereas the evil ones were destroyed in their homeland of Judah.

Instructions Concerning the Strangers, Oppressed, Widowed Orphan and Poor

Part 20 – Care of Strangers and Oppressed

Exodus 22:21 "And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Strangers are to be viewed as future friends and potential believers in the LORD. They are not to be treated as the Israelites were in Egypt after Joseph died. The Israelites knew well about being wronged and oppressed and they were not to treat strangers in their midst in the same way. Notwithstanding, strangers who had evil intentions were covered by other parts of this ordinance.

Part 21 – Orphans and Widows

Exodus 22:22 " You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. ²³ "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; ²⁴ and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

The LORD took the care of widows and orphans seriously. Failing to care for their needs would cause the LORD to send enemies to kill the guilty with the sword. Because the LORD takes credit for the death penalty imposed on those who oppress orphans and widows, it can be assumed that those men do not stand before the regular magistrates among the people; rather, the LORD will send enemies of the people to do the work on His behalf. Death by the sword usually occurred in war conditions. The death penalty fulfilled by the Israelites was usually imposed by stoning or burning.

Part 22 – Lending Money

Exodus 22:25 " If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.

“You shall not charge him interest” is an interesting line in this part of the judgment. The word **“interest”** comes from the Hebrew word than means *the venom from the bite of a snake*. A small venomous bite might seem insignificant at first but as the venom spreads to the rest of the body, diluted as it might be in comparison to the volume of fluids in the body, its poison overpowers the fluids bringing sickness or death to the person. And so it is with interest on money loaned to each other among the Israelites. At first it seems insignificant; perhaps it was only 7%, but 7% interest over 30 years turns a \$1,000 note into a \$2,395 debt repayment. Like

venom, the interest overtakes the original principal of the debt. Creditors charge interest because that is their business, but in the Israelite nation, the business of being a creditor to another Israelite was not to occur.

However, in this case, loans were permitted. We can assume that these loans were not of such magnitude that they required a person to become a servant or slave in order to pay back the debt. In other words, the person had the potential to repay the loan; nevertheless, the loan was to be made without interest.

Part 23 – A Pledge

Exodus 22:26 "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets,²⁷ for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.

The cloak is an interesting judgment on the LORD's behalf in this passage. The cloak was an outer garment carried by everyone at all times. It would be between six to eight feet long and at least five feet wide. It was the garment under which a person would sleep at night. In this judgment, the cloak had to be given to the borrower each night for him to sleep under; however, each morning the borrower would return it to the lender as collateral until the loan was paid. As such, the returning of the cloak to the lender was a daily reminder of the debt that still had to be paid.

Part 24 – Curse of God or Rulers

Exodus 22:28 "You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

The word “curse” as it was used at the time of the beginning of the English Bible translations meant *to be slight or trifling* but these definitions of these words are not common in today’s vocabulary. We think of cursing as the use of foul language, but in this passage, it means to belittle God and the rulers of the people with insignificant, unimportant and trivial complaints. It is the LORD’s judgment that a person is not to make petty and disparaging remarks about God or the earthly rulers.

Part 25 - Offerings

Exodus 22:29 " You shall not delay the offering from your harvest and your vintage. The first-born of your sons you shall give to Me.³⁰ " You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.

The word “first-born” should be translated *firstling or oldest*. Only the first son born to a family was to be dedicated to the LORD and then redeemed. The redemption cost will be given in a forthcoming passage. Here, the LORD lays the seed of the process. The oxen and the sheep were to be the first offspring of their mother. The animals were not to be redeemed, they would be sacrificed as an offering to the LORD. The offering was to be made promptly on the eighth day – without fail!

Instruction Concerning the Holiness

Part 26 – Food and Holy Men

Exodus 22:31 " And you shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat *any* flesh torn to pieces in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

Human digestive systems cannot handle the consumption of meat found in the field that may have been there long enough to begin to putrefy. If the kill was fresh and seen by the human, it would have been possible to quickly retrieve that dead animal, bled and cleaned properly for cooking; however, meat that could not be properly prepared within a certain time could be deadly even if cooked. Today, the limit for meat to be out of safe temperatures is four hours. Safe temperatures are below 40 degrees Fahrenheit and above 140 degrees Fahrenheit. A person has four hours between those two temperatures to prepare the meat and consume it. Any meat left between those temperatures for more than four hours should be thrown out because it has begun to rot beyond the capabilities of a human digestive system to process safely. On the other hand, a dog's digestive system can process meat that has been rotting for hours and days. The first thermometer was invented in 1612 by the Italian Santorio Santorio who lived from 1561-1636. It depended on the air pressure and was extremely inaccurate. Other instruments were created by other scientists until Gabriel Fahrenheit invented the mercury thermometer in 1724. It was the most reliable thermometer of its day and stood as a standard for temperature measurements for more than 300 years. However, it was not readily available to the general public in civilized nations until the last century. For most of the world, the measuring of the temperature of food is not even a consideration in the past or today. For that purpose, this judgment of the LORD still stands for Israel as it should for all the people of the world.

Eating rotting meat defiled the person from within; it is difficult for a person to be holy unto the LORD outwardly if he is sick inwardly. One restriction that was placed on the eating of meat is found in **Genesis 9:4-5, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood."** When an animal was slaughtered, it was hung so the blood could drain from its body. If an animal was found in the field, it was possible that it had lain there long enough for the blood to begin to congeal in the veins and arteries. Once congealed, it would have been difficult to remove that blood. Therefore, the meat with congealed blood was unholy for human consumption. That restriction was set in place as soon as Noah left the ark; therefore, all of the nations of the world that came from the descendants of Noah should have followed that restriction. But that was not the case. By the time the Israelites were at Mount Sinai, most nations regularly broke this original commandment. The LORD wanted His people to be holy as a nation and as individuals. For that reason, He put in place the Ten Commandments and the judgments found in this ordinance. They were to be holy even as He is holy; to do that, they needed to follow His commandments and ordinances.