

Exodus

Lesson #9, Chapters 21-24

After the giving of the Ten Commandments, God lays out more “family rules” for the nation, which we’ll be studying in this lesson. Below are a few things to keep in mind.

Studying the Old Testament

When studying the Old Testament, it’s helpful to consider: 1) What did the *original audience* understand when the instruction was given? 2) What *timeless truths* about God can we learn from this passage or section of Scripture? 3) Because all Scripture is profitable and useful for training in righteousness, what principles can you glean and apply to your life today?

A Word About Covenants

At this time in Israel’s history, Israel is the recipient of God’s gracious covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 15:5). God had not only promised to give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants, He also promised personal blessing to Abraham and his offspring. God also promised all the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham because of Jesus. Abraham didn’t do anything to deserve this favor from God, nor did his offspring. This *unilateral* covenant, also known as the *Abrahamic Covenant*, is in place simply because God chose to bless Abraham and his descendants *forever*. It’s amazing to consider that this covenant is still in effect today!

During the time when the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy take place, the nation of Israel also entered into another kind of covenant with God. This was a *bilateral* covenant, also known as the *Sinaitic Covenant*. God instituted the Sinaitic covenant with the nation of Israel during the time in which the book of Exodus takes place. The covenant with Abraham, which extends to the nation of Israel during the time of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, is a one-way covenant. God promised to love and care for the people of Israel. But when God rescued them out of Egypt, God also wanted to teach the nation about Himself and how to live lives that give Him glory in all things, so He gave them the laws at Mt. Sinai, which we are now studying. These laws are God’s way of teaching the nation about the things that are important to Him—things like holiness, love for God, and love for your neighbor. In essence, they are God’s “family rules,” so the nation of Israel can live in harmony with God. In this bilateral (two-way) covenant, Israel also played a role, saying they would keep God’s laws, follow Him, and love Him, for He would be their God and they would be His people. God promised to bless them in the land if they would obey Him.

Understanding the Law

The law, however, was *never* intended as a means of salvation. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6). Salvation has always been by faith as the means of pleasing God (Hebrews 11:6). The law was given to set Israel apart from the nations. Israel’s unique distinctness from the surrounding nations was to be a light pointing the nations to the One, True God. *God always intended that the law would lead people to Him*, that they would learn more about Him, and desire to walk with Him in faith. Everyone who was saved in the Old Testament times was saved by grace through faith in God,

just like everyone today is saved by grace through faith in God. In the Old Testament people looked forward to the promised Savior, while in New Testament we look backward to Jesus' sacrificial and finished work on the Cross for salvation.

“The law was not designed to regulate human behavior for the world at large, but to provide legal, moral, and religious guidelines for a *special people* chosen for a *special task*. The law is not a means of salvation, but contains instructions of how to live. At least four times in the New Testament it is clearly stated that the believer is not under the law (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18; 1 Cor. 9:20). The means of salvation for men in all ages has been faith. The Old Testament saint was never saved by law nor can one be saved by law in this dispensation (Rom. 3:20). The Old Testament saint was regenerated and justified by faith as is the one who receives Christ today. *The difference then is not in salvation, but the means by which one's conduct is governed.* In other words, in the Old Testament period fellowship with God was regulated by specific deeds and prohibitions accompanied with a series of checks and penalties. This was designed to protect Israel from the idolatry that surrounded her and provide the way for the appearance of Messiah. When Christ came He brought a new era of grace and truth (Jn. 1:17). *For the believer the law is nonetheless revealing and instructive. It gives insight into the mind of God and helps one to determine what standards of holiness He expects of those who follow Him.*”
– John J. Davis, from his commentary on Exodus, titled *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*.

For You

It's helpful to remember these key facts (above) when studying the Old Testament and the covenants, yet the most important thing to remember is that the means of salvation has *always* been *by faith* in God. Salvation comes when we look to God to provide everything we need for salvation. We can't please God based on our own merits and works, nor can any amount of faithful adherence to God's laws cover over our sin, for our sin can't be atoned for by the blood of bulls and goats (Hebrews 10:4).

Okay, with that in mind, let's dive into this study!

1. In Exodus 21:1-11, we find instructions regarding the treatment of slaves, specifically a fellow *Hebrew*. What surprising command is given to the master of a Hebrew slave in Exodus 21:2? What other provisional details are given in 21:3-6?

2. Unlike their male counterparts, a female Hebrew slave was not to be set free in the seventh year according to Exodus 21:7. What commands are given that protect women slaves in 21:8-11?

3. What do these laws teach us about God?

4. Read through Exodus 21:12-36. How would you categorize these laws? What do the punishments for breaking God's commands teach you about what God considers valuable?

5. In Exodus 21:28-36, we learn God intends we be held responsible for our actions. What scenarios are given in these verses?

6. As you look back over chapter 21, how would you describe the theme or common thread in all these laws? As you consider chapter 21, what would you say God is concerned about?

7. In a culture that takes no responsibility for a wrong or an injury and evades facing consequences, how would our society change if these principles were applied?
 - a. How can we practice these principles in relation to our brothers and sisters in Christ when an accident happens, or we neglect our responsibilities and disaster strikes?

8. In Exodus 22:2-4, we read about guidelines concerning a thief. What interesting distinctions stand out in the instructions given for a homeowner confronting a thief?

9. How would the guidelines about borrowing something from your neighbor in Exodus 22:14-15 make you pause and think the next time you wanted to borrow something?

10. The instruction given in Exodus 22 can be summarized as laws dealing with stealing. In the first part of the chapter, it's a bit easier to see this theme. Yet, the theme carries on into Exodus 22:16-17. With that in mind, what is being stolen?

11. Review the instruction given in Exodus 22:21-27. What do you learn about God from those regulations? How do the laws still fit with the theme of not stealing from one another?

12. In Exodus 22:28-31, we have different instances of stealing from God. How is the command in verse 28 stealing from God? See also James 4:11-12.
 - a. In verses 29-30 how is a *delay* in the giving of an offering, stealing from God?

 - b. Verse 31 isn't quite as obvious as the previous two examples, yet it's still an example of stealing. What's at stake if the nation doesn't obey verse 31?

13. In some ways the laws we're studying seem familiar and full of common sense, yet, not every country or culture lives within a framework like the one laid out here. Even for the

Israelites, coming out of 430 years of living in pagan Egypt, many of these laws must have seemed surprising. God was requiring that they live and interact with one another in completely new ways. How are the laws of Exodus 23:1-9 even somewhat foreign for our culture today?

14. What reasons are given for the Sabbath rest in Exodus 23:10-12?
 - a. What do you learn about the Sabbath rest from these other passages? See Genesis 2:2; Leviticus 25:2; Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

15. Another way God desired the Israelites to honor Him as their God is seen in the laws about the feasts in Exodus 23:13-19. What was the purpose of the feasts?

16. The Lord sent an angel with the Israelites. What do you learn about this angel from Exodus 23:20-23?
 - a. There are hints in the text as to who this angel might be because of how the Israelites were to follow the angel. The following texts will also help you formulate your answer: Exodus 3:2-6; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; Isaiah 44:6-8; 46:9.

17. What reason is given for the slow clearing of the land in Exodus 23:27-30?

- a. In Exodus 23:31-33 what reason is given for clearing out the inhabitants of the land?
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18. Chapter 24 tells us about the covenant ceremony. In verses 3-8 how did the people respond?

 19. What did the men who accompanied Moses up the mountain get to see and do (Exodus 24:9-11)? Also see Genesis 32:30; Deuteronomy 5:24; Judges 6:22-24; 13:22-23.

 20. After the time of eating together before the Lord, Moses alone is called further up the mountain, where he disappears into the cloud of the Lord's presence. Moses confidently entered into the Lord's glorious and holy presence, trusting in His mercy and grace to not put him to death. Read Hebrews 4:14-16 and consider what God desires from His children.

 21. Let's close our study on these chapters with the following questions:
 - a. What did the *original audience* understand when the instructions were given?

 - b. What *timeless truths* about God can we learn from section of Scripture?

- c. Because all Scripture is profitable and useful for training in righteousness, what principles can you glean and *apply* to your life today?

Oh, for a heart that is whiter than snow!
Then in His grace and His knowledge to grow,
Growing like Him who my pattern shall be,
Till in His beauty my King I shall see.
~Eliza Hewitt