

## EXODUS 21:1-23:33---THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

According to 1 Tim 3:16, all scripture is inspired by God. Because of that, every scripture is important. Sometimes certain passages don't seem relevant and would be easy just to skip or ignore. In the Old Testament there are just those kind of sections that come up. They can be somewhat hard to deal with. In our journey through Exodus, we have now arrived at that juncture. We could skip this section and move on. It speaks of slaves, oxen and donkeys, Sabbaths and festivals, and boiling a young goat in its mothers milk. These are far removed from us and it seems so filled with legalese. Most preachers would not want to use this section for a Sunday morning sermon

That is what I have discovered from commentaries and sermons I have checked out. There is just a blank space for this area. However, we are not going to do that. Because of our commitment to preach the Word in an expository manner covering all chapters of the books we go through, we will continue this manner. God's Word will have meaning for us wherever we are. Why would we want to leave out any scripture? There is something significant here and we don't want to miss it.

We need to remember to read the Old Testament in the light of Christ. Without seeing Christ in the O.T., all you have left is another religious book. Jesus said in John 5:39; "You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me." In Luke 24:27 Jesus said "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." If you believe Moses you will believe in the Christ.. The central message of Moses was about Christ. Just like the Emmaus disciples, people don't understand until Jesus opens them up to be able to understand the O.T. We want to read it Christo-centered. That is the way we read the Ten Commandments.

We now move into what is known as the Book of the Covenant as called in Exodus 24:7. It is a continuation of the 10 Commandments, giving details to those one sentence commands. The Book of the Covenant is the collection of specific commandments that God gave Moses up on Mt. Sinai, and then later Moses relayed those to the people. They are for everyday life. What is new here is specificity. **God is concerned with every detail of life. Belonging to Yahweh changes your life in every detail.** It's the nitty gritty details of life that God is concerned with. People would run into problems and questions such as; what if someone gets in a fight with someone else and kills them accidentally, what happens? The commandment said "Thou shalt not murder." There are cases in this text that are helpful for the Israelites to live by.

People, by nature, have trouble getting along together. That includes at home, in the neighborhood, on the job, and even at church. In the book of Exodus God is forming a community, a holy people, distinct from all other nations. If people are going to be holy, they will have to get along together, somehow. Israel was a holy, covenant people. These laws were made for them, for their own good. **But even more important is that God is showing His character, nature, in these laws. These show what He is like and what matters to Him. When things like theft or murder happens**

## **it matters to God.**

The Lord always intended for the law and the Book of the Covenant to point to something greater. It was to go outside of itself to within His people. In Ezekiel 36:26-27; God says He will put a new spirit within His people. We have the spirit of Christ in which the end has been accomplished. Christ has fulfilled the law and through Him we are and will be changed. The Lord is committed to His people that they change. But the change only happens because we *have been* redeemed. We don't change to be redeemed, we are redeemed first, and then we change. As we see these commands of the Book of the Covenant, we must see the Lord who saves His people and then changes them, sets them apart. Justice and mercy is certainly dominating this whole passage. God expects His people to exhibit justice and mercy, for this is what God is.

### **1. TREATMENT OF SLAVES 21:1-11**

We first start with the original audience as we interpret. There were many cultures who had different law codes. The Israelites code was embedded in a historical narrative where there is a living, active God who gives law to His people He redeemed. These are laws for life in the covenant community and God cares.

#### **A. VOLUNTARY SERVITUDE 1-6**

Slavery is the first issue.

Why is slavery mentioned first? It could have been about murder first.

The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, so they should take great care not to do the same thing that Egypt did to them. They are not to mistreat aliens, and they are to have proper conduct toward their own.

This is not racially based as we would today think of that.

This text would actually outlaw that.

They are instructed in what one could do with slaves.

There is affirmation that slaves are human.

They were voluntary slaves for reasons such as financial debt. Jews were permitted to own slaves from other nations, usually prisoners of war, they were not allowed to enslave their own people.

Slavery is not ruled out here. This section assumes the existence of slaves and even condones the practice. It seems that people, even free Israelites could be owned by other Israelites. The idea here is how the treatment of slaves was to be. They were to be in contrast with the pagan nations around them. There was never to be perpetual slavery. In the 7<sup>th</sup> year a slave was to be set free. But he could remain a slave if he so chose.

#### **B. FEMALE SLAVES 7-11**

A female slave was not automatically to be freed after six years. There were other factors involved there.

### **2. CASES OF PERSONAL INJURY 21:12-27**

#### **A. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT 12-17**

These covenant terms continue to reveal the character of God.. God places very high value on human life.

The Law made a distinction between premeditated murder and accidental manslaughter. There is a distinction between lying in wait in premeditation versus the passion of the moment. This is in our law today.

Exodus 20:13, Gen 9:6, Numbers 35:30-31

The sanctity of human life is important.

1. Premeditation

2. Killing and cursing parents

Striking and cursing of a parent has everything to do with how we see God.

The sanctity of family was very high on God's list. The dissolution of the family must inevitably rend to shreds the entire social fabric. If this fundamental institution breaks down, there is no foundation for society.

3. Kidnapping

A kidnapped person is treated as an object to be used for one's own personal gain and this can't be

B. NOT CAPITAL PUNISHMENT 18-27

1. Injuries to a free person

2. Servants injured

3. Pregnant woman injured

If a pregnant woman was struck by a man and that caused the baby to be prematurely born and there was harm done, there was a requirement of eye for eye and tooth for tooth. God wants justice.

4. Punishment must fit the crime

The law of retribution is what is meant here.

### **3. INJURIES INVOLVING ANIMALS 21: 28-36**

A. INJURED BY AN ANIMAL 28-32

If an oxen gored a man to death, what were they to do? Don't punish the owner unless the ox has done it before. If it had happened before, the owner was now considered to be negligent and held responsible.

B. ANIMALS INJURED OR KILLED 33-34

God has compassion for animals. Animals were meant to be treated well. God is concerned about all these things.

It was an agrarian society so animals played a key role in their livelihoods.

### **4. RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROPERTY 22: 1-15**

Every breach of trust must be dealt with. There has to be trust in community. What if everybody always has to have their eye on the other person?

There is to be respect for property.

God knew people would murder, lie, cheat, and steal. He knows what is in the heart of man. If left to themselves, they will come after each other, even in the home and at work and at church. God has to restrain, but it's more than that—it points to the fellowship of the church of God.

A. STEALING ANIMALS 1-4

2 Sam 12:6, Luke 19:8

In the daytime the thief could be identified and the victim could even get help from neighbors. At night it would be hard to identify the thief and would not know if he was armed or not. He would have a right to protect himself and even kill him.

B. CROPS 5-6

C. OTHER PEOPLE'S BELONGINGS 7-15

There has to be honesty and integrity in society.

### **5. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY 22: 16-31**

How were people to live together socially?

A. FORNICATION 16-17

A virgin who is not pledged to marry and is seduced by a man shall become that man's wife. If the father doesn't consent to them being married, the bride price must be paid either way.

- There must be restitution by the seducer. She was now damaged goods.
- B. SORCERY 18  
Lev 20:6, Deut 18:10  
They were to stay away from anything that resembles the occult.
- C. BESTIALITY 19  
This was a religious practice of the heathens. It was certainly a perversion.
- D. IDOLATRY 20
- E. SELFISHNESS 21-27  
The stranger is a disadvantaged group who should not be oppressed. The rich were not to exploit the poor. Oppression will not go unnoticed.  
God loves His people dearly and He protects them against abuse. The Israelites are not to do what Egypt did to them. How they treat each other is so important to God.
- F. REVILING AUTHORITY 28  
Blaspheming God was a capital offense. It was against the law to speak evil against a ruler.
- G. DELAY IN OBEYING 29-30  
Their best belongs to God.. Don't hold the best from God.
- H. DEFILED MEAT 31  
This would be equal to roadkill. It would make one unclean.

## 6. JUSTICE 23: 1-9

This section calls for justice in the courts.

This amplifies the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment.

Exodus 20:16

Psalms 82:3-4

We must put mercy and justice together for they are both here. Mercy is necessary to advance the purpose of justice in a fallen world. In this fallen world, we understand that life is not fair. In this text, God calls for Israel to be fair. They had been the objects of quite the opposite.. In some ways, mercy can reverse the effects of the Fall.

*Justice* is how we treat the guilty.

*Mercy* is how we treat the weak. That is a social justice.

When called upon to give testimony one must not side with the wicked, or pressure of the call.

Never to deny giving justice.

Vv4-5 An Israelite was to go out of his way to help another. In fact, you are to help your enemy as stated also in the NT

For Israel not to show compassion and mercy does not reflect the God of Mercy. Our God is merciful. To deny justice and mercy is to deny their history. If they disobeyed, they forgot who they were. When one does an act of mercy on the afflicted and oppressed, the one who receives the mercy experiences God's redemption, just like what Israel had received.

Mercy is justice because it makes right the wrongs of a world gone wrong.

**SO: 1. Israel must be merciful. 2. This is emblematic of a merciful God.**

**3. Mercy makes right, the wrong.**

## 7. SABBATHS 23: 10-13

The Book of the Covenant begins to end with the matter of worship.

Let my people go so they may worship me.

They were to be a worshipping community, that extends to every part of life. Every element of life, agricultural or socially, is to be lived out in God's presence.

## **8. FEASTS**

**23: 14-19**

## **9. GOD'S COVENANT PROMISES**

**23: 20-33**

This shows the commitment of Yahweh to His people.

1. God's promise of immediate presence, guiding and protecting them all thru the journey
2. God's promises to destroy all the enemies
3. God promised health, fertility, and long life
4. God promised to establish them in the land.

The angel represents the very presence of God.

What we glean from this Book is the understanding of the nature of God and what He requires of His people. Jesus summarized this as loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. We are to behave properly toward God and with each other.

The Exodus portrays our redemption from a slavery to sin.

But more than that: Rom 5:6—While we were weak, Christ died for the ungodly.

That is the highest picture of mercy. He did this according to His mercy.

He made right, all our wrongs. It is incredible that He forgave us. But there is more.

By meeting the needs of Israel and blessing them abundantly, He gave them the power to reverse the effects of the Fall. When they practiced mercy, they reversed the curse. The redemptive mercy of Christ made all this possible.

We have the ministry of mercy. We are to visit widows, orphans. It is our duty. We are not to be negligent or we are guilty. We must make the wrongs, right. Jesus overcame our weakness and we can do the same for the weak.

When we help the weak we are saying the Redeemer has come. We have the ministry of mercy because of the Gospel. This is a huge ministry. This law that God gave to the Jews has a broad expansive meaning for us today. It needs to be seen in the light of the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.