



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 22:16-23:9

Topic

God continues to give Israel law after law
to encourage their peaceful living together

Title

"Law-Law Land"

Every now and then, there's a story about the antics of an eccentric judge:

- In 2009, Circuit Judge Daniel Rozak sentenced Clifton Williams to six months in jail for yawning loudly when the judge sentenced his cousin to two years probation. The prosecutor in the case said the yawn was a "loud and boisterous" attempt to disrupt the courtroom.
- In 2005, Judge Robert Restaino, of Niagara Falls, New York, jailed all 46 people in his courtroom after none of them would admit to having the cell phone that began ringing during his court session.

Reality television has given us a few colorful judges - Wapner... Judy... Roy Brown. I'm pretty sure that we shouldn't think of the courtroom as a place to be entertained.

My favorite judge from the movies: Sylvester Stallone as Judge Dredd. "I am the law," he said, serving as futuristic judge, jury, and executioner.

Did you know that Stallone's slurred speech is the result of an accident at birth? During his delivery, forceps damaged the nerves to his face leaving the left side permanently numb.

In *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, Stallone plays Stakar, the leader of a group called the Ravagers. Trouble is, he couldn't pronounce it, but kept saying, "Ravenger."

We won't read about loud yawns or disruptive cell phones in our text from Exodus. We *will* read about a variety of legal issues being brought before the elders who had been appointed to help Moses judge cases.

We can step back and look at this as if it were the daily judicial calendar. Case after case came before the elders, and they were as diverse as you can imagine. It was their responsibility and privilege to apply the Ten Commandments and make their ruling.

Most of these cases refer to Israelites by birth. There are two verses about people from other countries living among them, here called "strangers."

Putting all that together, I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Since You're To Love Him As Yourself, You Will Want Justice For Your Neighbor, and #2 Since You're To Love Him As Yourself, You Will Want Justice For The Stranger.

#1 Since You Love Him As Yourself,
You Will Want Justice For Your Neighbor

On the surface, it was a daunting task. Several million Israelites, along with a mixed-multitude, found themselves in the desert. Their ancestors had been in Egypt over 400 years - a good portion of the time serving as slaves. They'd known only Egypt's laws, and mostly from the perspective of a subjugated people who had little legal recourse.

Redeemed by lamb's blood, they were being established by God as His own special nation on the earth. God had appeared to them in His glory; He had spoken to them from Mount Sinai. He was offering them a covenant, and had given them the Ten Commandments as its basis. They would soon serve Him in His earthly Tabernacle.

Greatest of all - Through Israel, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, would be born.

Before any of that could happen, *they'd need to get along with one another.*

They could, if they'd simply Love the Lord with all their heart and mind and soul; and Love their neighbor as themselves.

When that didn't happen, and, in fact, they mistreated one another, then the elders must judge the case.

Let's take a look at some of the cases that came before them, and get God's guidelines on their disposition.

Exo 22:16 "If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her *to be* his wife.

Exo 22:17 If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.

"Betrothed" is what we'd call "engaged," except it was a formal, legal contract that required a divorce to break. At the time of betrothal, a "bride price" - a dowry - was paid to the family of the bride.

We would call this premarital sex. It's hard to settle on solid statistical evidence, but one researcher summarized by saying, "Today, most Americans think premarital sex is okay, and will have three or more sexual partners before marrying."

Another study found, "Only 29% of American adults said premarital sex is "not wrong at all" in the early 1970s. Acceptance went up to 42% in the 1980s, remained flat in the 1990s, climbed to 49% in the 2000s, and surged to 58% in 2012."

When premarital sex results in a pregnancy, so-called "shotgun weddings" have declined.

About two-thirds of couples who had a premarital pregnancy in the early 1960s got married in a rush. That share fell to just about a quarter by the early 1990s, research shows. The latest analyses by researchers from federal agencies suggest a drop to single digits as more couples opt to live together rather than marry and don't want a child to rush them into marriage.

God's guidelines for Israel were the following:

- According to Deuteronomy 22:23-24, the seduction of a girl who was betrothed resulted in death by stoning for both parties.
- If an unengaged virgin submitted to seduction the guy was required to pay her bride price and marry her.
- If her father did not want his daughter to marry the guy, he was still obligated to pay the bride price.
- In addition, according to Deuteronomy 22:28-29, if they did marry, the husband in this situation could *never* divorce her.

These guidelines definitely curbed premarital sex. You were essentially deciding to marry, without the possibility of divorce; and if the father refused to let his daughter wed, the guy would be out the money he and his family had been setting aside for his marriage.

If part of you says, "Gee, that's harsh," it really wasn't. Consider the following two things:

1. Premarital sex robbed the family from participating in the joy of a betrothal and wedding. It was incredibly selfish, driven only by lust, not by love.
2. These guidelines mercifully provided for the girl, who might never marry, by demanding that the guy either man-up or pay-up.

Our guideline today, at least a big one, is Hebrews 13:4, which says, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Marriage as defined by God is between one biological man and one biological woman for as long as they both shall live.

It is a gift from God. Sex is to be restricted to those in a covenant of biblical marriage. Anything else is not only sin - it is less than God's best for you.

Both in ancient Israel and today you can avoid all the hassle by just saying "No" to sex outside of marriage - trusting that God, Who made you and loves you, has your best life in mind.

A quick word of grace: Many of us started-off wrong, or sinned along the way, but God has redeemed our situations. We should never sin that grace might abound; but when we sin, and repent, grace does abound.

Speaking of such grace, A.W. Tozer wrote, "The same grace that saved me will save you. Therefore, I recommend, if you have slipped a little bit, and all of us have at some point, just take the plunge into the ocean of God's grace."

Case closed. What was next on the docket?

Exo 22:18 "You shall not permit a sorceress to live.

Forget zoning laws to keep palm readers and mediums outside of city limits. Capital punishment will do it.

Seem harsh? Well, *then don't practice sorcery*. Nobody was forcing you to do it; it was a choice, and you knew the consequences.

Today we think of sorcery as a form of entertainment. Whether it's Harry Potter, or some television medium, it all seems not only harmless, but helpful.

The Bible is a supernatural book, revealing the supernatural realm. There are fallen angels and seducing spirits; there are demons.

When psychologist Carl Jung tells you that he was in contact with a spirit-being named Philemon, we say it was “Philemon the demon.”

It’s not all real. Harry Houdini made it an obsession to debunk psychics and mediums as frauds. But there are real sinister powers at work in many cases; and to protect the national psyche of Israel, God wanted those on earth who were in contact with them killed.

Best to steer clear of all this stuff.

The next case is rated MA:

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

Exo 22:20 "He who sacrifices to *any* god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

I read these together because the worship of these little-g gods sometimes involved depraved sex acts.

I’m going to quote a Canaanite epic poem, *The Baal Cycle*. You might want to cover the ears of any children. Ready?

*Mightiest Baal hears; He makes love with a heifer in the outback,
A cow in the field of Death’s Realm.
He lies with her seventy times seven... [She conceiv]es and bears
a boy.*

You may have heard of the Book of Enoch. It's not Scripture, but it is quoted as being reliable by both Peter and Jude; and references to it can be discovered elsewhere in the Bible. In one passage, the Book of Enoch seems to indicate that the angels who sinned by marrying and mating with human women to produce Nephilim giants may have also had sex with animals to produce some of the weird creatures that are made famous in various mythologies.

Let's move on. The next case, in verse twenty-one, involves a non-Israelite; let's take it up later, and go to verse twenty-two.

Exo 22:22 "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.
Exo 22:23 If you afflict them in any way, *and* they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry;
Exo 22:24 and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

"Kill you with the sword" was a warning that if such behavior persisted, God would punish the whole nation by using an invading army against them.

These verses allow us to recognize something we haven't mentioned yet, but that is part of all God's dealings. He is compassionate. In this case, His compassion is shown by His heart towards widows and orphans. God wanted His people Israel, and He wants His people the church, to be compassionate, as He is.

One of the first big decisions in the early church in the Book of Acts was the fair treatment of widows.

The apostles took it seriously and appointed their best seven men to oversee the distribution of goods to the widows.

Next case:

Exo 22:25 "If you lend money to *any of My people who are poor* among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest.

Exo 22:26 If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.

Exo 22:27 For that *is* his only covering, it *is* his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I *am* gracious.

No interest loans! Sign me up. If the guy was borrowing money, he probably only had the clothes on his back as collateral. You couldn't keep his outer garment overnight. It served as a sort of blanket - cause he was probably living outdoors.

Next case:

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

This has to do with recognizing the authority God has over your life. You belong to Him. True, you were set free by lamb's blood; but it was a freedom to serve God rather than sin.

The "ruler of your people" is God's delegated authority over you on the earth. I know - most of them seem ungodly. But we are to submit to them as unto the Lord.

No punishment is suggested, giving the elders some wiggle room to enforce this. Remember: These are guidelines on how to implement the Ten Commandments.

Next case:

Exo 22:29 "You shall not delay *to offer* the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me.

Exo 22:30 Likewise you shall do with your oxen *and* your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.

Israel was God's firstborn, having been spared by Him when death took the firstborn of Egypt on the night of the first Passover. These rituals involving the firstborn of man and beasts celebrated their redemption and salvation. They were a constant reminder of all that the Lord had done to save them.

The next case involved road kill:

Exo 22:31 "And you shall be holy men to Me: you shall not eat meat torn *by beasts* in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs

Not exactly road kill, but you get the idea. In such a case, the blood would not have been drained immediately, and to eat blood was a violation of God's law (see Leviticus 17). Also, there was the danger of infection from various diseases spread by animals.

But beyond those health issues is the fact that God wanted them set-apart from their neighbors.

The rules God established weren't always about health and hygiene. That's where some people go wrong and urge you to abide by all the Old Testament dietary restrictions.

Kosher Jews don't eat pork or crab. There's nothing wrong with pork or crab - no health or hygiene issues. One rabbi even said, "While the commandment to follow a kosher diet falls under the category of laws which do not necessarily seem logical, we observe them only because God commands us to."

God wanted them to have opportunities to share with Gentiles, and by being set-apart from certain things, questions would be asked, leading to witnessing about the goodness of God.

Exo 23:1 "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

An accusation required two witnesses to be verified. It would tempt folks to ask someone to falsify their testimony in order to act as the second witness.

Exo 23:2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert *justice*.

You'd be surprised how easily a person can be pressured by a crowd and go along with their wickedness. It would make it really tough on the elders.

This might be a good place to realize that these elders, hearing these cases, needed more than God's Law. They needed discernment that could only come from God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell believers in former times; that is a privilege given to the church age. But they could be filled with, and led by, the Spirit; He could come upon them.

He must, in fact, if they were to render decisions.

Exo 23:3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

This is interesting. We normally think of the “poor man” as the victim. He can be, for sure; but his poverty doesn’t insure his innocence. The elders shouldn’t show him preference.

Exo 23:4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.

Exo 23:5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

This is a “who’s-my-neighbor” thing. As Jesus would describe it, the real question is, “Who’s neighbor are you?”

You’re everyone’s neighbor - including your enemy’s. You’re to do good, as a good neighbor should. “Like a good neighbor, Christians are there.”

Exo 23:6 "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute.

“*Your* poor” reminded the elders that, though impoverished, the poor man was his brother. There was a sense of responsibility to show mercy. “But for the grace of God, there go I.”

Exo 23:7 Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.

Exo 23:8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.

These were ethics rules governing the elders who judged. Certainly you hoped to appear before someone who was impartial, and had the integrity to not be bribed - either directly, or by favors.

Commenting on this section, one author wrote:

The strictness of the Divine justice is seen in these ancient enactments; but there is also revealed the tenderness of the Divine compassion. The law is severe on evil-doers, in order that well-doers may be encouraged and strengthened. God is just to punish the unjust and the oppressor; but He is compassionate to the weak and helpless. How tenderly He cares for the widow and the orphan. Their mournful cries touch His Divine heart. Here are combined the justice of the ruler and the tenderness of the father. We must be just, but justice must be tempered by mercy, and sweetened by compassion. Let the beautiful **humanness** of our religion be always manifested.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that Jesus manifested a beautiful humanness in all of His dealings with people on the earth. He reached out to touch the leper, while not backing-down from exposing the legalist.

We need to let compassion overrule us without our compromising God's rules or rulership. We know what is right, and what is just. But we also know that God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to eternal life.

Do you remember the old Aamco Transmission slogan? “Our mission is transmissions.”

Our “mission” is the Great Commission - to go and as we are going, make disciples of all men.

Our mission is the Great Commission. Our manner ought to be compassion.

#2 Since You’re To Love Him As Yourself,
You Will Want Justice For The Stranger

We skipped a verse in chapter twenty-two; and there is one left in chapter twenty-nine.

Exo 22:21 "You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exo 23:9 "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

We know “the heart of a stranger.” In absolute numbers, the United States has a larger immigrant population than any other country, with 47 million immigrants as of 2015. This represents 19.1% of the 244 million international migrants worldwide, and 14.4% of the US population.

Many of us are the children or grandchildren of immigrants to this great nation. I for one am grateful my dad came over from Italy.

Our text speaks to a few basic issues regarding biblical immigration.

While researching it, I came across a pretty thorough analysis by a Christian professor at The Center for Immigration Studies. He made two excellent points from the language and context of the Bible:

1. The first was that “stranger” was a technical term describing a foreigner who had attained legal status in Israel.
2. The second was that in the geopolitics of the Bible there were recognized borders that required permission to pass.

The Israelites themselves, you remember, asked permission of Egypt to initially settle within their borders, in Goshen. They were granted permission, and thus had legal status in Egypt.

The article I’m referencing concluded that, “In the ancient biblical world, countries had borders that were protected and respected, and foreigners who wanted to reside in another country had to obtain some sort of permission in order to be considered an alien with certain rights and privileges.”

This tiny bit of information by no means resolves the complicated immigration issues we face. It simply keeps us from misapplying the Bible within the on-going debate.

As Christians, we should promote and obey the rule of law; but we must do so, always, with the compassionate “heart of a stranger.”

As Christians, our mission is what? That’s right - our mission is the Great Commission. We are to be about the Lord’s work, promoting the Gospel - which is the power of God unto salvation.

Whatever the political issue, if people get saved, then the situation will change dramatically.

Evangelist Charles Finney came to Rochester, New York in September 1830 to fill the pulpit of Third Presbyterian Church. The congregation was without a pastor and in danger of disbanding. Originally Finney and his team had declined the invitation.

After praying about it, Finney went. If you read the story, you'd say he was sent - by God the Holy Spirit. He preached every night, and three times on Sunday, while members of his team fasted and prayed.

In six-months, Rochester was completely transformed as 100,000 people came to salvation.

A pastor in New York who was converted in the Rochester meetings gave the following account of the effects of Finney's meetings that city:

The whole community was stirred. Religion was the topic of conversation in the house, in the shop, in the office and on the street. The only theater in the city was converted into a livery stable; the only circus into a soap and candle factory. Grog shops were closed; the sanctuaries were thronged with happy worshippers; a new impulse was given to every philanthropic enterprise; the fountains of benevolence were opened, and men lived to do good.

The Gospel doesn't stop you from being involved in the issues of the day. Together with several other evangelical leaders, Finney promoted social reforms, such as abolition of slavery and equal education for women and African Americans.

BUT: If you want to effect change, real change, work for the Lord by promoting the Gospel. Discover your gifts; attend every service you can; invite others to church; ask for opportunities to share your faith.

Do it all with the Lord's compassion. Show the humanness of our religion. Have the heart of a stranger.