

Bible Study # 38 Exodus 22:10–31 03/22/2021

Our instructions continue dealing with situations where you leave an animal (donkey, ox, sheep or any other animal) that is left in a person's custody, and it dies, or is injured, or is stolen when no one was watching. The contending parties had to appear before the Lord and an oath sworn that no hand had been raised against the lost animal, and the owner had to accept this declaration. No restitution money was required.

However, if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, then he had to make restitution. If a wild animal tore it to pieces, then, on production of the remains, the person was absolved from any payment.

The final case of property responsibilities is that of borrowing or hiring an animal. It concerns injury or death of an animal under three conditions. The first is when the owner is not present, and so the borrower is responsible for making restitution.

The second is when the owner is present, he, not the borrower has to accept responsibility. The third is when hiring has taken place, rather than borrowing, and if there is injury the owner must bear the loss.

Further implications for life of commitment to the covenantal God are spelled out in this section. God's holy people (v. 31) had to reflect his character in every sphere of life, and in so doing they had to be distinguished from the Canaanite people amongst whom they would be living ultimately.

The first situation dealt with concerns of the seduction of a virgin. These verses should be considered alongside Deuteronomy 22:28-29, that follow close after directions regarding how to deal with a case of rape (Deut. 22:25-27). The provision here is that if an unpledged virgin is seduced and sleeps with a man, he has to marry her, paying the customary 'wedding price'.

This is a rare word, only occurring in two other places in the Old Testament (Gen. 34:12; 1 Sam. 18:25), while the verb 'pay' only occurs here. Probably the 'wedding gift' was in addition to the compensatory money given to the girl's family. However, if the girl's father rejected the marriage proposal, he was still required to pay the 'wedding price', for the sin involved had to be acknowledged.

Sorcery was anathema to the Lord (v. 18), it being one of the Canaanite abominations that Israel was to shun (Deut. 18:10). It was an attempt to manipulate the future through use of potions and herbs. There is no indication why the feminine form 'sorceress' is used instead of the masculine 'sorcerer'.

In Deuteronomy 18, sorcery is condemned, but here the verdict is that a sorceress must not be allowed to live. No difference from the more common 'be put to death' is apparent.

Another Canaanite practice that was forbidden was having sexual relations with animals. The practice of bestiality with some animals was condoned among the Hittites, while permitted with others. It is condemned here and in Leviticus 18:23, 20:15-16, and in Deuteronomy 27:21.

Bestiality is a sin because it transgresses boundaries put in place by God between humans and animals, and so is a rejection of God's purposes in creation. In some cultures, people practiced it because they thought they could obtain union with the deity symbolized by the animal. This may explain why it comes in this context in conjunction with the prohibition of sacrifice to any pagan god in the very next verse (22:20).

Sacrificial activities were to be performed for the Lord alone. This exclusivism is spelt out more fully in Deuteronomy (see, for example, Deut. 4:39), and the concept of being devoted to destruction is also developed further (Deut. 3:6; 7:2; 13:16; 20:15, 17).

This is the first occurrence of the verb that means devoted to destruction. To be under the Lord's curse was to be devoted entirely to Him, being at His exclusive disposal. This usually meant destruction, though in some cases humanitarian considerations had to be considered (see, Deut. 20:10-15).

Israel's own experience in Egypt was to be the motivation for the treatment of non-resident foreigners living with them. Just as they had been aliens there, so they had now to have special regard for those in a similar position. The verb used for 'ill-treat' means 'to do wrong' to someone, and when it is used in Leviticus 19:33-34 in enforcing the same principle its opposite is 'to love as yourself.'

Israel's experience of Egypt, the great oppressor, should move them to ensure that no similar experience would happen to aliens within their borders. This instruction is repeated with some slight variation in Exodus 23:9, while other passages show the same concern for the alien (see Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 14:28-29; 16:11-14; 24:17-22; 26:11-13).

The most vulnerable in society in ancient Israel were widows and orphans, as they lacked the normal protection afforded by a husband and father. The verb used in relation to mistreatment of these classes has various meanings, but basically in the Old Testament it denotes humiliating or humbling someone. The consequence of such an action (vv. 23-24) is spelt out in a form that draws attention to its seriousness.

Firstly, it is introduced by the particle 'if' that regularly is used in oaths (with, or as here without, any introductory formula). Secondly, the threat is stated using the first person singular, 'I will certainly hear', 'my anger', 'I will kill you'.

God presents himself as the one who will personally protect those who are vulnerable, if they 'cry out' to him. This same Hebrew verb as was used of Israel in Egypt as in Exodus 3:7. Thirdly, the threat is stated in terms of the second person plural, 'your wives', 'your sons', that brings home sharply the consequences for any of the people who perpetrated such crimes.

God declares the punishment: 'I will kill you with the sword'. This could refer to death in warfare, or else be a metaphor indicating more generally death in a violent form.

Regulations regarding taking interest occur in several parts of the Pentateuch (cf. Lev. 25:35-38; Deut. 23:19-20). The principle is stated that a fellow Israelite was not to be charged interest. The reason is clear enough here from the fact that he was a fellow member of the covenantal community (notice the reference by God to 'my people').

This is expanded in Leviticus 25:35-38 by reference to redemption from Egypt and possession of the land of Canaan by Israel. The picture in verse 26 is of a very poor man to whom his pledge had to be returned each sunset so that he could sleep in it (see Deut. 24:12-13). The implication is that he had nothing else to give as security, while the return of the pledge each morning would have been a constant reminder of the debt.

An extra-biblical text found south of Tel Aviv refers to a farm worker who complained to the governor that his cloak had been kept overnight. If denied the return of the cloak, the man could cry to God who would hear, because he is the merciful God.

This declaration of God's character is enlarged later in what became a basic credal statement for Israel: 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exod. 34:6).

Respect for God Himself, and for the human officials who represented Him in society, was essential. Hence there could be no cursing of either. Different verbs are used in the two clauses in this verse, but in meaning they are very close.

The first of these has already been used in reference to parents in 21:17. The word used for 'ruler' was earlier employed of the leaders of the people in 16:22. All authority structures in Israel depended on delegation by God, and so respect had to be given both to Him and to His deputies in society.

These verses enunciate the principle that, as all the good things of life came from God, offering of first fruits was an acknowledgement of this fact and an act of thanksgiving on the part of covenant servants. The instruction was not to withhold offerings from your vats.

The commitment of the first-born son to God has already been set out in 13:2. The same principle was applied to cattle and sheep, which, on the eighth day, were presented to God, just as the male child was circumcised on the eighth day.

Rather than the normal command to be holy, the distinctiveness of God's people is described as being 'men of holiness'. Commitment to the redeemer had to be expressed in outward behavioral patterns that matched inward trust in Him.

One example of such behavior is cited. Rejection of the meat of an animal killed by wild beasts was necessary, first, because the wild beast could be an unclean animal, and, secondly, because the blood would not be treated in the appropriate manner.

We will study next Exodus 23:1–19.