

Study 23: Moses, Part 10 Exodus 22-23

The Law has been given now, spoken directly to the people. This was so terrifying to them that they asked Moses to be the one to act as mediator between themselves and God. We continue now to go through what appear to be a miscellaneous list of laws, seemingly disconnected from one another. However, there is a connection, either of *theme*, or of *key words*, as we shall see.

Ex 22 “Whoever steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it must pay back **five** head of cattle for the ox and **four** sheep for the sheep.

2 “If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck a fatal blow, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; 3 but if it happens after sunrise, the defender is guilty of bloodshed.

“Anyone who steals must certainly make restitution, but if they have nothing, they must be sold to pay for their theft. 4 If the stolen animal is found alive in their possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—they must pay back double.

5 “If anyone grazes [Hebrew: *hiv’ir* “to cause to graze”] their livestock [Hebrew: *be’ir* “beast”] in a field or vineyard and lets them stray and they graze in someone else’s field, the offender must make restitution from the best of their own field or vineyard.

6 “If a fire breaks out [Hebrew: *hiv’ir* “to set a fire”] and spreads into thornbushes so that it burns shocks of grain or standing grain or the whole field, the one who started the fire must make restitution.

7 “If anyone gives a neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping and they are stolen from the neighbor’s house, the thief, if caught, must pay back **double**. 8 But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear before the judges [Hebrew: *Elohim*, cp. Ps 58:1; 82:6; John 10:34-35 “he called them gods, to whom the Word of God came”], and they must determine whether the owner of the house has laid hands on the other person’s property. 9 In all cases of illegal possession of an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or any other lost property about which somebody says, ‘This is mine,’ both parties are to bring their cases before the judges. The one whom the judges declare guilty must pay back **double** to the other. [Restitution must be made, quite unlike our current system of justice, in which the guilty person must either be imprisoned, or pay a fine, the money of which never goes to the victim, but to the legal system!]

10 “If anyone gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to their neighbor for safekeeping and it dies or is **injured** [Hebrew: *nishbar*, lit. “broken”] or is **driven away** [Hebrew: *nishbah*, “carried off”] while no one is looking, 11 the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other person’s property. The owner is to accept this, and no restitution is required. 12 But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, restitution must be made to the owner. 13 If it was torn to pieces by a wild animal, the neighbor shall bring in the remains as evidence and shall not be required to pay for the torn animal.

14 “If anyone borrows an animal from their neighbor and it is injured or dies while the owner is not present, they must make restitution. 15 But if the owner is with the animal, the borrower will not have to pay. If the animal was hired, the money paid for the hire covers the loss.

16 “If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. 17 If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins.

18 “Do not allow a sorceress to live.

19 “Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal is to be put to death.

20 “Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed [the Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord, often by totally destroying them].

21 “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

22 “Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

25 “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27 because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

28 “Do not blaspheme God [or *Do not revile the judges*] or curse the ruler of your people.

29 “Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats [the meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain].

“You must give me the firstborn of your sons. 30 Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day. [The circumcision of boys was to take place on the 8th day].

31 “You are to be my holy people. So do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts; throw it to the dogs.

Ex 23 “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness.

2 “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, 3 and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.

4 “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.

6 “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. 7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and **do not put an innocent or honest person to death**, for I will not acquit the guilty.

8 “Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent.

9 “Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

10 “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, 11 but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.

12 “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed.

13 “Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.

14 “Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me.

15 “Celebrate the **Festival of Unleavened Bread** [that begins the day after Passover, so sometimes called “Passover” because of its close association with it]; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv [their first month, later called Nisan], for in that month you came out of Egypt. [Remember, too, that there was to be a “holy convocation” on the first and last days of this feast. The word “convocation” (Hebrew: *miqra*) means “meeting,” or “**rehearsal**”].

“No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

16 “Celebrate the **Festival of Harvest** [*Shavuot* – Firstfruits, Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks because some translators have chosen to assume that the word “Sabbath” could be replaced with the word “weeks”. This feast began the day following the first day of Unleavened Bread] with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. [This was the beginning of the barley harvest.]

“Celebrate the **Festival of Ingathering** [*Sukkot* – Feast of Tabernacles] at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. [This was the beginning of the wheat harvest, and took place in Tishri, their 7th month.]

17 “Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord.

18 “Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast.

“The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning.

19 “Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.

“Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk. [What’s this about? Milk, for the baby animal, was the source of life. To use it to bring about death would be callous indeed. This appears to demonstrate God’s concern and care for the animals He created. This same prohibition is repeated in Ex 34:26 and Deut 14:21. Other places that seem to show this respect for animals are: Deut 22:6, which prohibits the taking of a mother bird along with her young; Lev 22:8, that says not to slaughter a cow or sheep and its young on the same day; and Deut 25:4, that says you should not muzzle an ox while it is treading out grain. Although Paul cites this in 1 Cor 9:9, and says it was not that God cared about the ox, but that this was an example that showed that a workman should have a share in any money produced by his labor. Of course, Paul is making a point, and does so. This doesn’t mean, however, that God did not care for the ox. He did, and the inclusion of this law demonstrates that.]

20 “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. 21 Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since **my Name is in him**. 22 **If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say**, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. 23 My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. 24 Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. 25 Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, 26 and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.

[We will have to cover verses 27-33 next week.]