

DEVOTIONAL 3



GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS 21:1-32

¹ “Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. ² When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. ³ If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴ If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out alone. ⁵ But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free;’ ⁶ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

⁷ “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. ⁹ If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. ¹⁰ If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

¹² “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. ¹³ But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee.

¹⁴ But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.

¹⁵ “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

¹⁶ “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

¹⁷ “Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

¹⁸ “When men quarrel and one strikes

the other with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die but takes to his bed, ¹⁹ then if the man rises again and walks outdoors with his staff, he who struck him shall be clear; only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall have him thoroughly healed.

²⁰ “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. ²¹ But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

²² “When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. ²³ But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

²⁶ “When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. ²⁷ If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

²⁸ “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall not be liable.

²⁹ But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. ³⁰ If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him. ³¹ If it gores a man’s son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule. ³² If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

DAY 1

EXODUS 21:1

“Now these are the rules that you shall set before them.”

Day to day, tensions among humanity overshadow our lives. From tensions in the home, to disputes at work, debates over politics, or altercations around race we feel the pinch of our relational fallenness. As Israel emerged from slavery in Egypt and began to operate as their own nation, they too experienced interpersonal and social disruption.

Over the next two weeks we will be looking at verses from the Book of the Covenant that paint a picture of the kind of society that God wanted Israel to be. As we dig deeper many of the specific laws highlighted will seem foreign to us, mostly because they are. These are laws that were specific to Israel’s historical and cultural situation and should not be applied directly to today. But there is great value in studying these laws because in them we meet the heart of the lawgiver (i.e. YHWH) who shows a compassionate and just heart for every race, gender, and social class—every person, born or unborn.

In the end this Book of the Covenant points us to Christ himself. For what the law was unable to do, Christ did by offering himself for this same humanity (cf. Rom 8:3). In Christ we see that the gospel promises extend to every tribe, tongue, people and nation (cf. Rev. 7:9). We see there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Gentile who does not have access to the free gift of salvation that satisfies the demands of the law (cf. Gal. 3:28). These laws lead us to the heart of God. At the heart of God we find Jesus and the story of the gospel.

PRAYER

YHWH, we thank you that you are the same yesterday, today and forever. We thank you that from one generation to the next you care for the people you have created, calling them to live in just and compassionate relationships with one another. We also know that living according to the way you lay out will be different from the nations. Help us to have the courage we need to walk this way in our day. Thank you, Jesus, that you have done what the law could not do for us as sinful people. You gave us new hearts and righteousness apart from the law. As we seek to live out our gratitude may we seek your heart in your law. In Jesus sweet and precious name. Amen.

DAY 2

EXODUS 21: 7-11; 22:25-27

^{21:7} “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. ⁹ If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. ¹⁰ If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.”

^{22:25} If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. ²⁶ If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, ²⁷ for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

We read in yesterday’s devotional that some laws in the Book of the Covenant are difficult to understand. Today we encounter one of these. God describes what should happen when a poor family, who has no prospect of improving their situation, has an opportunity to “sell” their daughter to a more “well-off” family. To our modern ears, almost everything about this passage is cringeworthy. Selling a daughter? “Pleasing” her master? What’s going on?

Much could be written about the context of this law. However, as we were reminded yesterday, these laws, statutes, and commandments were given to Israel so they could live as God’s people. What’s remarkable about these statements is that when we unpack the values and purposes behind them, we find a compassionate and loving God.

God intended for Israel to live differently from the rest of the nations, who placed a hierarchical value on their people. If you were in high society, you were safe from some of the worst parts of life, and you received lesser punishment for crimes. Each of the laws in chapter 21 place a value of dignity and worth on each image-bearer.

This passage shows a God who is loving and compassionate to all people. He makes provision and law for those who are low, poor, and downtrodden. The gospel tells us that we have a King who not only rules from a high place, but makes a way for all people to be a part of His kingdom.

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, thank you for your law. Thank you for making a way for us through Jesus. We have a King who loves us and has compassion for us. No matter our state, status, or the severity of our sin, we can be made whole through Jesus when we come to him with a repentant heart. Give us grace, Father, as we seek you and your kingdom and orient our lives accordingly. Amen.

DAY 3

EXODUS 21:16, 20-22

¹⁶ “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

²⁰ “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. ²¹ But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

²² “When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine.”

As we go through this study of Exodus, it is important that we continue to remember the context of these passages. As mentioned on Day 1, this is “from the Book of the Covenant that paint[s] a picture of the kind of society that God wanted Israel to be.” These laws describe the pattern of life that the Lord calls His people to. Not only that, but in the words of the Book of the Covenant, we find the *zealous affections of a God who invites His people into a life defined by His very own truth, beauty and goodness.*

Today’s passage enters into marginal spaces to defend the defenseless. These laws decry a selection of some injustices that were seen in that day: forcibly taking people and selling them off as if nothing more than livestock, abuse of slaves (read bond-servants) who were meant to be entrusted into the care of an advocating master, and the willful violent attack on women and their unborn children. This is certainly not an exhaustive list. Yet from this sampling we see the common thread of mercy and justice for the defenseless.

God’s definition of a flourishing society does not only make space for the prosperous leaders. Quite the contrary, the vision of a blessed shalom-saturated society that the Lord provides is one where the weak, the poor, and the defenseless are held in high honor. Where their care is not an afterthought. Instead, there is a people that loves, provides, and defends proactively because they are enlivened by the very heart of God.

Isaiah chapter 61 articulates this vision of a Spirit-filled, Kingdom-oriented, brokenness-redeeming people of God. Close today’s devotional with a time praying through these words. Ask God to shape your heart and life according to His—for Jesus’ namesake and for our shalom.

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.
They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.*

DAY 4

EXODUS 22:21-24

²¹ You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. ²² You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, ²⁴ and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

^{23:9} You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

My great, great paternal grandfather emigrated from Ireland, with a wife and two children, near the end of the potato famine in 1850. The famine lasted there seven years with one million people starving and another two million people leaving, mostly for America. He settled in central Ohio and established a family farm there. While we don't have any written documents from him, it is clear that he brought his family to the U.S. because he wanted them to survive. He knew firsthand how bleak the opportunities were in Ireland at that time.

While many of the texts in the Pentateuch are difficult to apply in our day because of the cultural differences with the Ancient Near East, these texts on the sojourner are not difficult to understand or apply. In fact, they were written in a context very much like ours. People all over the world are still forced to move because of natural disasters and wars. Estimates are that there are 70 million refugees and displaced people in the world today.

In addition, as political upheavals continue to lead to lengthy wars in countries like Syria and Yemen, as extensive corruption continues in many countries, and as failed states are unable to serve their people, there will be an ongoing need for Christians to act with godly compassion.

The clear application of the sojourner passages for us is that they fall under the principles inherent in the second great commandment: We are to have compassion for others as we would want others to have compassion for us. God clearly has compassion for the sojourner, for the people who are displaced from their homes by natural and human disasters. We see that compassion throughout the stories of the Old Testament in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jacob's sons, and Naomi and Ruth. Later in the Old Testament, we also see God's compassion in bringing Israel back from captivity in Babylon.

While many of the Irish arrived on our shores destitute and without help, some people somewhere must have helped my great-great-grandfather and his family get to Ohio, likely through the Erie Canal. Some people must have helped in his effort to acquire land and begin farming. At a minimum, he must have received some kindness. I might not be here without it. In 1853, my great-grandfather was born in Ohio, and my family line was established.

Let's ask God how he wants us to care in a practical way for the "sojourner"—for those who are displaced and suffering.

PRAYER

Father, soften and enlarge our hearts to see what you see. Grow the fruits of generosity and kindness in our lives so that we can serve you and the people you send us to serve. Help us to better share your love and the prosperity we receive from you.

DAY 5

EXODUS 22:27

And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

We wouldn't know what compassion was if God didn't show us. God doesn't define compassion for us, he IS compassion. Any tenderness we may have, any sense of justice, of right and wrong, of wanting to protect another—is all from God. Let's sit with that reality for a bit.

The rules in the verses this week were written for people of an ancient culture very different from ours. But however different the culture was, they were still people just as we are, with God's image in us all. And it was the same God who hears the cries of the afflicted and who is compassionate.

So as we read about the relationship rules between slaves and masters, we need to see past our cultural wounds toward how these rules were actually ensuring that people were being cared for. When we read about how a master must continue to provide for a female servant whom he had taken as a wife but then rejected, we need to see through to the compassion and mercy of God who makes sure those with power are providing for the powerless.

Even when someone causes the death of another human, God is nuanced and has different consequences for those who killed intentionally and those who didn't.

God keeps reminding the reader that vengeance is his. These rules aren't saying that slavery as we know it is okay or that having more than one spouse is fine or murder is no problem if we didn't mean to do it. No, in all these things God is making things new in his own way. He was as patient with this ancient culture as he is with ours. His is the way of compassion and justice that many times is a complete mystery to us.

As our verse says today, we can be sure that when we cry out to God, he hears us and will respond with compassion. What we can't ever be sure of is what that compassion will look like!

PRAYER

Oh Lord, we pray that your kingdom come and your will be done. Open our eyes to see your compassion at work in the world. Help us to see the unseen around us, maybe even right beside us. It is hard for us to understand your truth. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed and look away. May your compassion and wisdom grow in us. Amen.