

# Exodus 21 Commentary

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Irving Jensen ([Online](#)) - Used by Permission  
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 View Chuck Swindoll's chart of Exodus.

Summary Chart of The Book of Exodus									
<b>DELIVERANCE FROM OPPRESSION</b>						<b>PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP</b>			
Redemption from Egypt Ex 1:1-18:27						Revelation from God Ex 19:1-40:38			
Getting Israel Out of Egypt						Getting Egypt Out of Israel!			
Narration						Legislation			
Birth of Moses Ex 1-2	Call of Moses Ex 3-6	Conflict with Pharaoh Ex 7-10	Exodus from Egypt Ex 11-12	Red Sea Crossed Ex 13-15	Journey To Sinai Ex 16-18	Law Given Ex 19-24	Tent Plan Ex 25-31	Idol Worship Ex 32-34	Tent Built Ex 35-40
Subjection			Redemption			Instruction			
Suffering and Liberation of People of God			Guidance of God			Worship of God			

<b>Moses and Burdens of Israel</b>	<b>Pharaoh and Plagues Upon Egypt</b>	<b>Red Sea Deliverance</b>	<b>Wilderness Provision</b>	<b>Sinai Instructions</b>
<b>Bondage and Oppression</b>		<b>Deliverance and Provision</b>		<b>Law Pattern and Construction</b>
<b>Israel in Egypt Ex 1:1-13:16</b>		<b>Israel to Sinai Ex 13:17-18:27</b>		<b>Israel at Sinai Ex 19:1-40:38</b>
<b>God's People Enduring Bondage</b>		<b>God's Grace Revealed in Redemption</b>		<b>God's Glory Manifested in Worship</b>
<b>Egypt 430 Years (15% of Exodus)</b>		<b>Wilderness 2 Months (30% of Exodus)</b>		<b>Mt Sinai 11 Months (55% of Exodus)</b>
<b>From Groaning</b>				<b>To Glory!</b>

[Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament - online](#)

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[Click another Exodus from Egypt](#)

[Click for Events during the Sojourn at Kadesh-Barnea](#)

<b>GENESIS</b>	<b>EXODUS</b>
human effort and failure	divine power and triumph
word of promise	work of fulfillment
a people chosen	a people called
God's electing mercy	God's electing manner
revelation of nationality	realization of nationality

**SUMMARY OF THE PENTATEUCH**  
(from Believer's Study Bible)

### Exodus 21:1 "Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them."

BGT Exodus 21:1 κα τα τα τ δικαι ματα παραθ σεις ν πιον α τ ν

NET Exodus 21:1 "These are the decisions that you will set before them:

NLT Exodus 21:1 "These are the regulations you must present to Israel.

ESV Exodus 21:1 "Now these are the rules that you shall set before them.

LXE Exodus 21:1 And these are the ordinances which thou shalt set before them.

KJV Exodus 21:1 Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.

NIV Exodus 21:1 "These are the laws you are to set before them:

ASV Exodus 21:1 Now these are the ordinances which thou shalt set before them.

CSB Exodus 21:1 "These are the ordinances that you must set before them:

- **the ordinances:** Lev 18:5,26 19:37 20:22 Nu 35:24 36:13 De 5:1,31 6:20 1Ki 6:12 2Ch 19:10 Ne 9:13,14 10:29 Ps 147:19 Eze 20:11,25 Mal 4:4
- **which:** Ex 19:7 24:3,4 De 4:5,8,14,45 6:20 Mt 28:20 1Th 4:1

- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
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Outline from [Irving Jensen](#)

### The Setting

- Promise Exodus 19:1–6
- Preparation Exodus 19:7–15
- Phenomena Exodus 19:16–25

### The Laws

- Basic Laws Exodus 20:1–17
- Laws in Detail Exodus 20:18–23:19
- The Promises Exodus 23:20–33
- The Response Exodus 24:1–18

See Summary of Purpose of Law in 4 Pictures

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## PRESCRIPTIONS FOR PREPARATION OF GOD'S POSSESSION

We are reminded of Jehovah's words to Israel in Exodus 19:5+ "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be **My own possession** among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine." They had now heard His voice directly in Exodus 20:1-17 (cf Dt 4:12, 33, 36, 5:22-28) and now they would hear His voice through His prophet and mediator Moses.

Exodus 21:1-23:33 is essentially a unit wherein Jehovah gives Moses a "manual" which prescribes pious practices for God's possession so that they might manifest themselves among the pagan nations as a **holy nation** (Ex 19:6+) pointing to the one True and Living God. In Exodus 24:4 we read "Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD." Then in Exodus 24:7 Moses "took the **book of the covenant** and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"

**First**, by way of review, keep the overall structure of the book of Exodus in mind by looking at the chart above and noting the clear line of demarcation beginning in Exodus 19 and continuing to the end of Exodus 40.

**Second**, notice the titles of the last half of the book - "Revelation from God," "Preparation for worship," "Getting Egypt out of Israel (Contrasted with "Getting Israel out of Egypt!"), "Legislation," "Instruction," "Worship of God," "Sinai Instructions," "God's Glory Manifested in Worship," "Mt Sinai 11 months." In summary, from Exodus 19-24 God presents the Law to Israel and one of the main purposes for the Law is to serve as a guide to the people of Israel as to how they live as a holy or set apart nation. The 10 Commandments are a summary and the detailed laws in Exodus 21-23 are in a sense an "exposition" of the 10 commandment.

**Third**, keep the geographic context in mind. Where is Israel? At the foot or base of Mt Sinai where **the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night**," (Ex 13:22+) had led them and where they would remain camped for the next 11 months. Actually, a more accurate description is that once the Tabernacle was constructed, the cloud remained over the Tent serving the same function which the divine cloud had served since Exodus 13:22 (Read Nu 9:15-23). If the cloud remained, Israel was to remain. If it moved, Israel was to move. And so during these 11 months the cloud remained and Israel remained during which time the events of Exodus 19-40, the entire book of Leviticus and the first section of the book of Numbers 1-10:11 took place. Numbers 10:11 records **"Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony."** The divine cloud had been the symbol of God's power, presence, protection and guidance every day and every night for 11 months. The cloud had been the visible evidence to the sons of Israel that Jehovah was continually in their midst. Clearly this 11 month period was crucial in the formative period of the "newborn" nation of Israel and God was preparing His people with His instructions ("**ordinances**" in Ex 21:1-23:33) through His mediator Moses. These ordinances were moral, ceremonial and judicial ordinances in preparation for Israel's entrance into the promised land. If Israel would obey these laws, she would live as set apart nation, a holy nation.

**Fourth**, the climax of God's giving of the laws is found in Exodus 24 when God cut a covenant with Israel based on the laws. After receiving the ordinances from Jehovah (Ex 21-23), Moses came down from Mt Sinai and recounted the law orally to the people who responded "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do." (Ex 24:3). Then Moses wrote these down in the the BOOK OF

THE COVENANT (Ex 24:4), sacrificed animals and collected the blood. Then he sprinkled blood on the altar (representing God) (Ex 24:6) read the book to the people, who for a second time affirmed "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" (Ex 24:7) Then in the final step of ratification of the Old Covenant, Moses sprinkled the people with blood, the blood speaking of the solemnity and binding nature of the covenant. Israel was now in effect "married" to Jehovah her Husband (Isa 54:5, Jer 31:32). Sadly, even after all of the spiritual evidence of Jehovah's presence, power, provision, protection and now His precepts, and their entering into this binding covenant, the sons of Israel quickly proved to be a faithless "bride"! And so we read the tragic events reflecting the nation's rebellion and disobedience in Exodus 32:1-5ff!

Before we are too hard on Israel, we need to recall Paul's words that "these things happened as **examples** for us, so that (TERM OF PURPOSE) we would not crave evil things as they also craved...Now these things happened to them as an **example**, and they were written for **our instruction**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Cor 10:6,11). Paul's point is reading the Old Testament is valuable for our spiritual well-being!

**RECOMMENDATION:** Now before you study the **ordinances** in Exodus 21-23 which are quite detailed, you need to keep the overall picture in mind so that you do not become bogged down in what appears to be tedious minutiae. And to help you get a good perspective let me suggest taking 8 minutes to watch the summary by **Dr Gene Getz** in his [Video entitled "The Greatest Commandments"](#). Dr Getz reminds us that the first 4 of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 relate to our relationship with God ("vertical") while the last 6 commandments relate to our relationship with each other ("horizontal"). Then in Exodus 21-23 he notes that God focuses primarily on the last 6 commandments spelling out specific details on how the sons of Israel were to interact with one another.

- **Laws about Slaves**
- **Laws about Personal Injury**
- **Laws about Theft**
- **Laws about Crop Protection**
- **Laws about Seduction**
- **Law about Capital Offenses**
- **Laws about Protecting the Vulnerable**
- **Laws about Honesty and Justice**

One other point to keep in mind as you study the 10 Commandments and the detailed description of the **ordinances** is Jesus description of the Law in the New Testament

(Mt 22:37-40) And He said to him, " **YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.**" 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, '**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

**Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them-** The word **ordinances** (regulations, rules, judgments) describes what is right in God's eyes and if followed leads to right behavior among men and blessing by God. The Hebrew noun mishpat in this context (Ex 21:1-23:33) refers variously to laws, regulations, prescriptions, specifications, and is presented as both spoken or written commands (ultimately Moses recorded all these ordinances not just the "Ten Commandments") which were to be obeyed, with some of the **ordinances** linked with prescribed penalties for non-compliance.

**Currid** - The law given at Sinai is a definite advance over the Mesopotamian codes. In the latter there exists a notable lack of emphasis upon ethical and spiritual matters; Mesopotamian legal documents are quite humanistic. (Ibid)

**George Bush** says ordinances "here signifying the statutes, judicial laws, or rules of judgment, by which their civil government was to be conducted, and according to which the magistrates were to give judgment in disputed cases or differences arising between man and man. As their government was a Theocracy their entire legislation was from God. No part of their code, whether civil or ecclesiastical, originated with themselves, or was left to be modified by the dictates of human prudence."

And so Moses is instructed by Jehovah to **set** these divine **ordinances before** the sons of Israel, all the people. The Hebrew verb "**set**" (sum) is translated in Greek with the verb paratithemi which literally means to "place beside" or "place before," emphasizing that this divine revelation was to be Israel's ever present "compass" for life, always in their mind's eye (so to speak) (cf the same purpose of "phylacteries" or frontlets = toptaphoth" in Ex 13:16+, Dt 6:8, 11:18), ever guiding their *steps* and their *stops*" (so to speak). The Hebrew word for **before** is panim emphasizing the same thought as "set" because it means face. The point is that Moses is to place these basic divine instructions in Ex 21:1-23:33 right in front of their face so that they could not miss God's desire for His **special possession** (Ex 19:5+) and might then live their lives with these ordinances always in view as Jehovah's guidelines for holy living. Israel's holy living would in turn serve to assure that she was a **holy nation** (Exodus 19:6+), a light of

revelation (fulfilled in Israel's Messiah - Lk 2:32+) among the godless, idolatrous pagan nations, eer pointing them to the one Holy God.

**THOUGHT** - Yahweh's purpose and goal for Israel is the very same purpose and goal for every believer today! God is still Holy. Nations are still unholy. God is calling us to be dynamic, Spirit filled lights to the world. He desires us as His **holy nation** to **proclaim the excellencies of Him Who has called us out of** (SPIRITUAL) **darkness** (THE LOST WORLD, THE DOMAIN OF THE DEVIL - Col 1:13-14<sub>±</sub>, Acts 26:18+) **into His marvelous light** (JESUS - Jn 8:12). (1 Peter 2:9<sub>±</sub>) So it is no surprise that in one of the first commandments Jesus issued in His Sermon on the Mount was the call for His disciples to SHINE! "**Let** your light **shine** before men in such a way (SPIRIT INITIATED, SPIRIT EMPOWERED WORKS) that they may see your good works (Jn 15:5 works), and glorify (GIVE A PROPER OPINION OF) your (INVISIBLE) Father Who is in heaven. (Mt 5:16<sub>±</sub>). In short, our **VISIBLE** "*good* (God) *works*" are to point others to the supernatural Source, our **INVISIBLE** Father Who (Jn 1:18+ - AND NOW THAT FUNCTION OF "EXPLAINING" HIM IS THE JOB OF [EVERY DISCIPLE OF CHRIST WHO ARE NOW CALLED TO LIVE LIKE HE LIVED](#)).

Paul gave a parallel commandment in Philippians 2:14-16 calling for **all** saints, all disciples of Jesus, to "**Do** ([present imperative](#) [continually, habitually!] see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#) - notice Paul has just described this Supernatural Source making this possible in Php 2:13NLT<sub>±</sub> = God in us, the Spirit Who gives us both the DESIRE and POWER **not** to grumble. Otherwise it is **IM**-possible. Not grumbling is only **HIM**-possible!) **all** (THIS IS THE CATCH! NOT SOME THINGS BUT "**ALL**" THINGS - NO EXCEPTION CLAUSES!) things without grumbling or disputing; **15 so that** (TERM O PURPOSE) you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of (NO "HOLY HUDDLES"! ) a crooked and perverse generation, among whom **you appear as lights in the world**, **16** holding fast ([present tense](#)) the Word of Life (THIS HOLY BEHAVIOR IS ONLY POSSIBLE BY RELYING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE HOLY WORD! cf Jn 6:63), so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain." (Phil 2:14-15<sub>±</sub>)

**Ordinances** (04941) ([mishpat/mispat](#) from **shaphat** = to judge, govern) is a masculine noun used over 400x in the OT and has general meanings including a judgment, a legal decision, a legal case, a claim, proper, rectitude. **Vine** writes that [mishpat/mispat](#) "has two main senses; the first deals with the act of sitting as a judge, hearing a case, and rendering a proper verdict. Eccl. 12:14 is one such occurrence. Mishpat can also refer to the "rights" belonging to someone (Ex 23:6). This second sense carries several nuances: the sphere in which things are in proper relationship to one's claims (Ge 18:19—first occurrence); a judicial verdict (Dt. 17:9); the statement of the case for the accused (Nu 27:5); and an established ordinance (Exod. 21:1). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary](#))

The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates [mishpat](#) in Ex 21:1 with the Greek noun [dikaioma](#) (from [dikaióo](#) = to justify <> [díkaios](#) = just, righteous <> [dike](#) = right) which refers to what God has declared to be right, so as to have the force of law; hence an ordinance. Simply stated [dikaioma](#) is what God He has established and in Exodus 21:1-23:33 declares as right (righteous) and **just**. The word **just** means honorable, fair in one's dealings and actions with others, and consistent with what is morally right.

**Exodus 21:2 "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment."**

BGT Exodus 21:2 ν κτ σ πα δα Εβρα ον ξ τη δουλε σει σοι τ δ βδ μ τει πελε σεται λε θερος δωρε ν

NET Exodus 21:2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years, but in the seventh year he will go out free without paying anything.

NLT Exodus 21:2 "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he may serve for no more than six years. Set him free in the seventh year, and he will owe you nothing for his freedom.

ESV Exodus 21:2 When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.

LXE Exodus 21:2 If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve thee, and in the seventh year he shall go forth free for nothing.

KJV Exodus 21:2 If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out

free for nothing.

NIV Exodus 21:2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.

ASV Exodus 21:2 If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

CSB Exodus 21:2 "When you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to serve for six years; then in the seventh he is to leave as a free man without paying anything.

NKJ Exodus 21:2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.

NRS Exodus 21:2 When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt.

YLT Exodus 21:2 'When thou buyest a Hebrew servant -- six years he doth serve, and in the seventh he goeth out as a freeman for nought;

- **an Hebrew:** Ex 12:44 22:3 Ge 27:28,36 Lev 25:39-41,44 2Ki 4:1 Ne 5:1-5,8 Mt 18:25 1Co 6:20
- **but on the seventh:** Lev 25:40-43,45 De 15:1,12-15,18 31:10 Jer 34:8-17
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**John Currid** explains "The reason why slavery laws appear so early in the Book of the Covenant is that Israel had just come out of bondage in Egypt. This experience was still fresh in their minds, and God used the opportunity to show them how they were to be distinct from the Egyptians even in the matter of slavery. And Israelite laws of slavery strongly contrast with the harsh rules of other ancient Near-Eastern cultures; slaves in Israel were very well treated. They were carefully protected by the Torah; they could not be oppressed; they had rights to Sabbath rest and national festivals. Slaves often became part of the family, with rights and positions of trust....The type of slavery we are seeing in this section is a form of indenture—that is, an Israelite sells himself or a family member into slavery to repay a debt incurred through poverty or theft." (EPSC-Ex)

**George Bush on buy...slave** - it does not by any means necessarily convey the idea of Hebrew servants' being bought and sold as goods and chattels, as they are under the system of modern slavery, especially in our own country. Here, as the service among the Hebrews was for the most part voluntary, the 'buying an Hebrew servant' may as legitimately imply the buying him from himself, that is, buying his services, as any other mode of purchase. Indeed, as there is no positive proof that Hebrew servants were ever made such or kept in that condition by force, against their own consent, except as a punishment for crime, the decided presumption is, that such is the kind of 'buying' here spoken of.

**If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years** - Jehovah is not commanding slavery, but does give instructions to be followed if one bought a Hebrew slave from other Hebrews. The Hebrew verb [abad](#) (key word in Ex 21- uses 7x) is translated in the Septuagint with [douleuo](#) which in the NT describes one whose will is subjected to the will of his master. The first use of abad in Exodus is of Moses calling himself a "servant" of Yahweh. Notice also that while the word **slave** is used here, this word does not convey the same sense as when the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt. A distinction is being made here between the status of slave and [indentured](#) servant. (see Lev 25:39 below). If a master actually struck a slave and injured him, that slave was to be set free (Ex. 21:26-27).

**Serve** (05647)([abad](#)) means to work (Ge 2:5, 15), to serve (be enslaved or held in bondage used in Ex 6:6+; Lev 25:38, 39 Lxx = Lxx = [douleuo](#))(Ge 14:4, 15:13, 14 - Lxx = [douleuo](#)). It is interesting that abad means **labor** (as when Israel was in Egyptian bondage - Ex 1:13,14) but abad is later translated worship after redemption Ex 3:12, Ex 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, et al where Lxx = [latreuo](#)). God told Abraham that his descendants would "**serve**" the people of a strange land 400 years (Ge 15:13), meaning, "to be enslaved by." **Ābad** is often used toward God: "you shall **worship** God at this mountain." (Ex. 3:12). The word is frequently used with another verb: ""You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall **worship** Him" (Deut. 6:13), or "It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to **serve** Him with all your heart and all your soul," (Dt. 11:13). All nations are commanded: "**Serve** the Lord with gladness ..." (Ps 100:2). In the reign of Messiah, "all nations shall **serve** him" (Ps 72:11). The verb and the noun may be used together as in Nu 8:11" **Abad** in Exodus - Ex 4:10; Ex 5:15; Ex 5:16; Ex 5:21; Ex 7:10; Ex 7:20; Ex 8:3; Ex 8:4; Ex 8:9; Ex 8:11; Ex 8:21; Ex 8:24; Ex 8:29; Ex 8:31; Ex 9:14; Ex 9:20; Ex 9:21; Ex 9:30; Ex 9:34; Ex 10:1; Ex 10:6; Ex 10:7; Ex 11:3; Ex 11:8; Ex 12:30; Ex 12:44; Ex 13:3; Ex 13:14; Ex 14:5; Ex 14:31; Ex 20:2; Ex 20:10; Ex 20:17; Ex 21:2; Ex 21:5; Ex 21:7; Ex 21:20; Ex 21:26; Ex 21:27; Ex 21:32; Ex 32:13;



**But on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment-** A Hebrew owner could not hold a Hebrew as his servant forever, but had to release him in the seventh year of service. The slave did not have to pay a price to gain his freedom. It was analogous to the Sabbath in that the Hebrew slave could now experience "rest" from his servitude to another Hebrew. The seventh year is known as [a sabbatical year](#). See the additional rules below in Dt 15:12-18 (additional truths are in **bold font**).

**Related Resource:**

- [What is a sabbatical year?](#)

**G Campbell Morgan** - the condition of slaves among the Hebrew people would be in marked distinction to slavery as existing among other peoples. It was the beginning of a great moral movement.

**George Bush** - Being made free by law he was to pay nothing for his liberty. Nor was he required to pay for any thing else. Although he might during the period of his service have labored under sickness, and put his master to cost, yet no compensation was to be expected from him at the time of his release; for a man's servant was during his servitude as his own possession for which he was bound to provide at his own charges.—One cannot but be struck with admiration at perceiving what kind provisions were made for the Hebrew bondman; how carefully he was guarded from violence, injustice, and wrong. **The circumstances under which a native Hebrew might become a slave were the following;** (1.) When under the pressure of extreme poverty he sold his liberty to preserve himself or his family from suffering; Lev. 25:39, 'If thy brother be waxen poor and be sold unto thee,' &c. (2.) When sold for a like reason by a father; v. 7, 'If a man sell his daughter to be a maid-servant,' &c. Comp. Neh. 5:5. (3.) Insolvent debtors might, as a punishment, be sold for servants, or, by way of payment, put into the hands of their creditors as slaves; 2 Kings, 4:1, 'My husband is dead—and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.' (4.) A thief who was unable to make restitution for what he had stolen, according to the proportion required of him by the law, was sold by way of requital to him whom he had robbed; Ex. 22:3, 4, 'If he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.' (5.) Slaves were acquired by the issue of the marriages of slaves. The condition of slavery, however, is undoubtedly regarded in the Scriptures as an evil, yet, as it was an evil that had prevailed in the world long before the establishment of the Jewish polity, infinite wisdom did not see fit at once to root it out, but enacted such meliorating laws in respect to it as would tend to divest it of its most aggravated and cruel features, and render it as tolerable as a state of bondage could well be. In like manner he regulated without extirpating polygamy.

This stipulation was elaborated on in two other books, Leviticus at the beginning of the nation and Deuteronomy just prior to Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. And so we read...

**Leviticus 25:39-43** If a countryman of yours (A HEBREW) becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. 40 'He shall be with you as a hired man (A HIRED WORKER), as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. 41 'He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers. 42 'For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale. 43' You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God.

**Deuteronomy 15:12-18** "If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. 13 **"When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed.** 14 **"You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.** 15 **"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.** 16 "It shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; 17 then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant. 18 **"It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man; so the LORD your God will bless you in whatever you do.**

**David Guzik** - Some think that the Bible is responsible for slavery. The opposite is true; slavery existed long before Israel or Moses. The Bible is responsible for the elimination of slavery, not its establishment. The ideas of man-stealing and life-long servitude—the concepts many have of slavery—simply do not apply to the practice of slavery in the Old Testament. Normally, slavery was: (1) Chosen or mutually arranged (2) Of limited duration and (3) Highly regulated There were four basic ways a Hebrew might become a slave to another Hebrew.

1. In extreme poverty, they might sell their liberty (Leviticus 25:39).
2. A father might sell a daughter as a servant into a home with the intention that she would eventually marry into that family (Exodus 21:7).

3. In the case of bankruptcy, a man might become servant to his creditors (2 Kings 4:1).
4. If a thief had nothing with which to pay proper restitution (Exodus 22:3–4).

**Spurgeon** - Moses did not institute slavery in any shape; the laws concerning it were made on purpose to repress it, to confine it within very narrow bounds, and ultimately to put an end to it.

**Alan Cole** - The Torah accepts slavery as an inevitable part of ancient society, much as Paul did, but the new humanitarian approach will ultimately be the death-knell of slavery ... In any case, slavery in Israel was rural, domestic and small scale.

**Spurgeon** comments on Hebrew slavery - THE slavery which existed among the ancient Jews was a very different thing from that which has disgraced humanity in modern times, and it ought also to be remembered that Moses did not institute slavery in any shape or fashion. The laws concerning it were made on purpose to repress it, to confine it within very narrow bounds, and ultimately to put an end to it. It was like the law of divorce—Moses authored that law, but he knew that the people were so deeply rooted in it that it could not be forbidden. And therefore, as Jesus tells us, Moses, because of the hardness of their hearts, allowed them to put away their wives. And so, I may say, because of the hardness of their hearts he allowed them, still, to retain persons in servitude; but he made the laws very stringent, so as almost to prevent it. Among other repressive regulations, this was one, that when a slave ran away from his master it was contrary to law for anyone to assist in sending him back again. And with such a law as that, you can clearly see that nobody need remain a slave, since he could run away if he liked; it was nobody's business—no, it was a sin for anybody to force him back again. Now, if a man can go when he likes, his slavery is a very different thing from that which still curses many parts of the earth; but the case stood thus, and sometimes persons who were insolvent, who could not pay, were compelled by the law to give their services to their creditors for a certain number of years, always limited, as you see in this case, to six. A man who had committed theft, instead of putting the country to the expense of a prison, was sometimes fined for his theft sevenfold; and if he had no money he was placed in servitude till he had bought himself free again—an institution not altogether indefensible, I think, and having a good deal of rough justice about it. Sometimes a person who was extremely poor would sell his services for the six years, which are here prescribed, to some wealthy person who was bound to house him, clothe him, and feed him. This is very much like a system which still exists in some parts of our own country, where a person's services are hired for the year, with so much nourishment to be given, and so much of wages. (Sermon - [Ear Bored with an Awl](#))

#### **Related Resources:**

- [Does the Bible condone slavery? | GotQuestions.org](#)

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#### **David Thompson gives some background on slaves in the Old Testament...**

Now this first part of the Law starts with a focus on the treatment of human beings. Specifically, this part of the O.T. Law starts by presenting laws pertaining to human beings who could be mistreated and abused the most and that would be the slaves.

Now slaves were a fact of life when the O.T. was written. In fact, the Hebrew words translated “servant,” “slave” or “maidservant” are used more than 1000 times in the Old Testament. The normal word that is used for “slave” (ebed) means a servant or slave and it may also be used in a context of a worker or laborer (William Gesenius, Hebrew Lexicon, pp. 559-600).

During this time there were no businesses or corporations who hired people. Almost all of the businesses were what we would call “small businesses” in the sense that they were family owned and family operated. The “servant/slaves” in the O.T. context were humans who were owned by masters and they needed work and because they worked for a master, they could be exploited. They did not have much and they did not run companies so they were subject to the masters who owned them. So God begins with a series of laws that apply to them.

What these slave laws did was to give employees and employers certain rights. The Egyptians had mistreated Israel by forcing Israel into horrible slave labor situations, and God's Law protected that from happening in His people and nation.

#### **Now there were various kinds of slaves in the O.T..**

- 1) There were foreign -born slaves whose lives had been spared in war on the condition that they would become permanent workers in Israel (Josh. 9:23; 1 Sam. 4:9).
- 2) There were six -year servant slaves, who worked for an employer for six years in return for wages and benefits.



3) There were servant- born slaves, who were born into a master's house, who owed the master something for providing housing and wages and care.

4) There were temporary slaves or servants who worked for a master for a temporary period of time (maybe even one day) for wages. ([Sermon](#))

**Exodus 21:3 "If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him.**

BGT Exodus 21:3 ν α τ ς μ ν ο ς ε σ λ θ κ α μ ν ο ς ξ ε λ ε σ ε τ α ι ν δ γ υ ν σ υ ν ε ι σ λ θ μ ε τ α τ ο ξ ε λ ε σ ε τ α ι κ α γ υ ν μ ε τ α τ ο

NET Exodus 21:3 If he came in by himself he will go out by himself; if he had a wife when he came in, then his wife will go out with him.

NLT Exodus 21:3 If he was single when he became your slave, he shall leave single. But if he was married before he became a slave, then his wife must be freed with him.

ESV Exodus 21:3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

LXE Exodus 21:3 If he should have come in alone, he shall also go forth alone; and if his wife should have gone in together with him, his wife also shall go out.

KJV Exodus 21:3 If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

NIV Exodus 21:3 If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him.

ASV Exodus 21:3 If he come in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he be married, then his wife shall go out with him.

CSB Exodus 21:3 If he arrives alone, he is to leave alone; if he arrives with a wife, his wife is to leave with him.

NKJ Exodus 21:3 "If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

NRS Exodus 21:3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.

YLT Exodus 21:3 if by himself he cometh in, by himself he goeth out; if he is owner of a wife, then his wife hath gone out with him;

- comes in alone - De 15:12-14
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **STATUS OF SLAVE'S RELEASE DEPENDS ON WHETHER SINGLE OR MARRIED**

**If he comes alone, he shall go out alone-** The NLT is a good interpretation - "If he was single when he became your slave, he shall leave single."

**If he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him-** Literally - "if he was a possessor of a wife" Again the NLT is a good interpretation - "But if he was married before he became a slave, then his wife must be freed with him." The point is that if a husband had to be enslaved (e.g., as payment of a debt), his wife was also brought into the household as a slave, but would also be released in year seven of service.

**Exodus 21:4 "If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone.**

NET Exodus 21:4 If his master gave him a wife, and she bore sons or daughters, the wife and the children will belong to her master, and he will go out by himself.

NLT Exodus 21:4 "If his master gave him a wife while he was a slave and they had sons or daughters, then only the man will be free in the seventh year, but his wife and children will still belong to his master.

ESV Exodus 21:4 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.

LXE Exodus 21:4 Moreover, if his master give him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters, the wife and the children shall be his master's; and he shall go forth alone.

KJV Exodus 21:4 If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

NIV Exodus 21:4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.

- **shall belong to her master** Ex 4:22 Ge 14:14 15:3 17:13,27 18:19 Ec 2:7 Jer 2:14
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone** - "The slave would not have the right or the means to acquire a wife. Thus, the idea of the master's "giving" him a wife is clear – the master would have to pay the bride price and make the provision. In this case, the wife and the children are actually the possession of the master unless the slave were to pay the bride price – but he is a slave because he got into debt. The law assumes that the master was better able to provide for this woman than the freed slave and that it was most important to keep the children with the mother. " (NET Note)

**Constable** points out that "We should read verse 4 with the following condition added at the end of the verse: unless he pays a ransom for them. This was possible as is clear from the instructions regarding the redemption of people that follow."

**Go out alone** can also be translated "**by himself**" which Alan Cole explains is "Literally 'with his back', i.e. 'bare back and nothing more'. The phrase is vivid and unique, but the meaning is clear. This provision may seem hard to us, but the wife was presumably a perpetual slave, and therefore the master's own property."

**Currid** - The Hebrew debtor-slave was not without recourse regarding his family. He certainly had the right of obtaining manumission for them by paying a ransom (Lev. 25:47–55+). (Ibid)

#### **Exodus 21:5 "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,'**

NET Exodus 21:5 But if the servant should declare, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'

NLT Exodus 21:5 But the slave may declare, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children. I don't want to go free.'

ESV Exodus 21:5 But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'

LXE Exodus 21:5 And if the servant should answer and say, I love my master and wife and children, I will not go away free;

KJV Exodus 21:5 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

NIV Exodus 21:5 "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,'

- **And if:** De 15:16,17 Isa 26:13 2Co 5:14,15
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LOVE OF THE MASTER

**But** - Term of contrast. Note this passage is clearly linked to the former where the master provides a bride for the man while he is a slave.

**if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man-** So the slave desires to stay not only because he loves his wife and children, but also loves his master. Deuteronomy 15:16 gives an additional reason the slave would want to stay "since he fares well with" the master. In other words he is treated well and treated fairly.

**Love** (0157)(**ahab/ahab**) has less to do with emotion and more to do with actions.

**Spurgeon** comments the slave who desires to remain under the master - Well, the law here says that if a man should have sold himself, or by insolvency should have come to be sold to his master, at the end of six years he might go free; he was quite free to leave his master's house and go where he pleased, but it seems that the servitude was so exceedingly light, and, indeed, was so much for the benefit of the person in it, that frequently men would not go free. They preferred to continue as they were—servants to their masters. Now, as it was not desirable that this should often be the case, and as it was recognized that oppressive masters might sometimes frighten a servant into such an agreement, the law was made that in such a case the matter must be brought before the judges. And before them the man must say plainly—note that word—he must say it very distinctly and plainly, so that there was no doubt about it, that it really was his wish not to accept his liberty, but to remain as he was. And then, after he had stated his desire and given as his reason that he loved his master—and loved the children and the wife that he had obtained in his service—his ear was to be pierced against the door of the house. This ceremony was intended to put a little difficulty in the way, that he might hesitate and say, "No, I won't agree to that," and so might, as was most proper, go free. But if he agreed to that somewhat painful ceremony, and if he declared before the judges that it was his own act and deed, then he was to remain the servant of his chosen master as long as he lived! (Sermon - [Ear Bored with an Awl](#))

**Exodus 21:6 then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.**

NET Exodus 21:6 then his master **must bring him to the judges**, and he will bring him to the door or the doorposts, and his master will pierce his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him forever.

NLT Exodus 21:6 If he does this, his master must present him before God. Then his master must take him to the door or doorpost and publicly pierce his ear with an awl. After that, the slave will serve his master for life.

ESV Exodus 21:6 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.

LXE Exodus 21:6 his master shall bring him to the judgment-seat of God, and then shall he bring him to the door,-- to the door-post, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him for ever.

KJV Exodus 21:6 Then his master **shall bring him unto the judges**; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.

NIV Exodus 21:6 then his master **must take him before the judges**. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

ASV Exodus 21:6 then his master shall bring him unto God, and shall bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.

CSB Exodus 21:6 his master is **to bring him to the judges** and then bring him to the door or doorpost. His master must pierce his ear with an awl, and he will serve his master for life.

NKJ Exodus 21:6 "then his master **shall bring him to the judges**. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

NRS Exodus 21:6 then his master shall bring him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.

YLT Exodus 21:6 then hath his lord brought him nigh unto God, and hath brought him nigh unto the door, or unto the side-post, and his lord hath bored his ear with an awl, and he hath served him -- to the age.

NAB Exodus 21:6 his master shall bring him to God and there, at the door or doorpost, he shall pierce his ear with an awl, thus keeping him as his slave forever.

NJB Exodus 21:6 then his master will bring him before God and then, leading him to the door or the doorpost, his master will pierce his ear with an awl, and the slave will be permanently his.

GWN Exodus 21:6 then his master must bring him to God. The master must bring him to the door or the doorframe and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his slave for life.

- **his master shall bring him:** Ex 21:22 12:12 18:21-26 22:8,9,28 Nu 25:5-8 De 1:16 16:18 De 19:17,18 1Sa 8:1,2 Isa 1:26 Zep 3:3
- **shall pierce his ear:** . Ps 40:6-8
- **shall serve him permanently:** Lev 25:23,40 De 15:17 1Sa 1:22 27:12 28:2 1Ki 12:7
- Spurgeon's sermon [The Ear Bored with an Awl](#)
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BECOMING A "LOVE SLAVE" PIERCING THE EAR WITH AN AWL**

**Then his master shall bring him to God** - Note that there is a difference in renderings of the phrase bring him to God, several versions (NET, NIV, KJV) favoring the rendering "Bring him to the judges." (see NET Note below). The NASB has a marginal note "the judges who acted in God's name." Either translation signifies that there is to be an authoritative witness, either God Himself or judges who represent Him.

**NET Note** - The word is **הָאֱלֹהִים** (ha'elohim). S. R. Driver (Exodus, 211) says the phrase means "**to God,**" namely the nearest sanctuary in order that the oath and the ritual might be made solemn, although he does say that it would be done by human judges. That the reference is to Yahweh God is the view also of F. C. Fensham, "New Light on Exodus 21:7 and 22:7 from the Laws of Eshnunna," JBL 78 (1959): 160–61. Cf. also ASV, NAB, NASB, NCV, NRSV, NLT. Others have made a stronger case that it refers to judges who acted on behalf of God;

**Then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl**- Since the expression "to have an open ear" meant "to obey," a pierced ear lobe was an ancient symbol of obedience. See also Spurgeon's sermon [The Ear Bored with an Awl](#).

**THOUGHT** - Larry Richards' applies the **slave's pierced ear** - In a real sense, we Christians are to be a people of pierced ears. Our commitment to Jesus is not made simply that we might enjoy the benefits of salvation. Our commitment acknowledges Christ as Lord. It is because Jesus is Lord that our spiritual ears are to be always open to him. Our obedience is to be the lifelong mark of our choice of Jesus as Savior and Lord. (Expository Dictionary)

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, is this literal mark (pierce his ear with an awl) not a picture of the heart attitude every blood bought believer should have as bondservants of our loving Master the Lord Jesus Christ, Who Himself took **"the form of a bondservant"** and out of love humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Php 2:5-10+), allowing Himself to be pierced with nails that we might be permanently bound to Him in the New Covenant!

**Currid** - The act is carried out at the doorpost to recall Israel's putting the blood of the covenant on their doorposts in Egypt. The piercing of the slave's ear is also a bloody ritual **symbolizing a covenant**, an oath between the Hebrew servant and his Hebrew master. It should be noted that, according to Deuteronomy 15:17, this law of servitude applies to both male and female slaves. (Ibid)

**Treasury of Scripture Knowledge** - This significant ceremony was intended as a mark of permanent servitude, and was calculated to impress the servant with the duty of hearing all his master's orders, and obeying them punctually

**And he shall serve him permanently** - Even as the scar was permanent, so too was to be the servitude.

A female servant was not automatically set free after six years.

**Guzik** - Pagans had a custom of branding the slave with the name or the sign of the owner. Paul referred to himself as just such a slave in Galatians 6:17: From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body **the marks** of the Lord Jesus. Paul was a slave for life to Jesus.

In Ps 40:6 we read "Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have **opened** (Heb - [karaḥ](#) - dug, pierced); Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required." The writer of Hebrews quoted this verse in Hebrew 10:5-7 as referring to the words of Jesus to His Father. **Henry Morris** explains that "The "opened ear" refers to the boring of a hole in the ear of a bond servant who,

after becoming eligible for freedom, chooses instead to remain forever in the service of his master (see Exodus 21:6). This ritual symbolized the dedication of the servant to hear and obey only his master's orders." Mine ears hast thou opened" (Hebrews 10:5 from Psalm 40:6) is here translated as "a body hast thou prepared me." The openings in the ear of an indentured servant (Exodus 21:6) indicated **the intent of that servant to serve his master forever, as it were, hearing only the voice of his master and doing only his will henceforth.** This was a type of Christ, who willingly became a bondservant (Philippians 2:5-8), willing even to die in accord with His Father's will. But before He could do this, He had to have a human body, with human ears. (Defender's Study Bible)

**Zuck** adds "The idea of having one's ears pierced is closely connected to the fact that Jesus had a body prepared for Him by God the Father. As Westcott wrote, "The 'body' is the instrument for fulfilling the divine command, just as the 'ear' is the instrument for receiving it." The Septuagint obviously gave a free translation of the Hebrew, using the words "body" and "prepared" in place of "ears" and "pierced."" (Basic Bible Interpretation)

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**Herbert Lockyer** - The master then bored a hole in the slave's earlobe with an awl (Exod. 21:6), and the pierced ear signified perpetual slavery. It was this wonderful truth Bishop C. G. Moule (1841-1920) realized when he wrote these expressive lines:

My Master, lead me to Thy door,  
Pierce this now willing ear once more.

.....  
And pierced ears shall hear the tone  
Which tells me Thou and I are one.

**Do we bear in this part of our body the marks of the Lord Jesus? What deeper spirituality would be ours if only our ears were more closely identified with the ears of Jesus! How can we expect to have tranquility of soul if we allow the rude voices of the world to enter our ears without a protest?**

Open my ears, that I may hear  
Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;  
And while the wavenotes fall on my ear,  
Everything false will disappear.

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#### **F B Meyer - Exodus 21:6 With an awl.**

The Hebrew slave who meant perpetual consecration of service had to lose a little blood. It was a disagreeable and not wholly painless process, by which his vows were ratified and rendered permanent. But not otherwise could he serve for ever. That awl represents the nail that affixed Christ to the cross, and we must expect it in every true act of consecration. For want of it so many seem to go through that supreme act, and shortly after go back from it, bringing discredit and shame upon the teaching they had eagerly welcomed. There are two stages in the Christian life: that in which we serve with the spirit of a slave, and that in which we freely yield ourselves to serve our Master for ever. This is the service represented by the pierced ear.

The awl spiritually means the humiliation and pain with which we surrender the self-life. We are tempted to consecrate ourselves in our own energy; to resolve on the devout life in the strength of our own resolution; to say, "I will serve Christ utterly." We avoid the awl which deprives us of our own energy, which is applied to us by the hand of another, and which makes us helpless and self-empty, that God may become all in all. In your case the awl may be the daily fret of some uncongenial associate; the pressure of loss and anxiety for the sake of Jesus; the humiliation of your pride by perpetual sense of failure. Whatever it be, welcome all that binds you to his cross, because through death you live.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

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#### **G Campbell Morgan - I will not go out free. . . . Then ..Ex. 21.5, 6.**

Among the first of the "judgments" following the enunciation of the Ten Words of the Law, were those which regulated slavery. A careful consideration of them will show that they abolished slavery, and substituted for it, covenanted labour. A man might buy a servant, but only for a period of six years' service. In the seventh year he must go out free. No man was allowed to hold men or women as his property in perpetuity. Here, however, was an exception. There were certain circumstances under which one man could become the servant of another for the whole period of his life. That, however, could not be by the compulsion of the master,

but by the deliberate choice of the servant. It has been said that no man ought to yield himself up thus to the service of another, that such a choice could only issue in the degradation of life. There is an element of truth in the contention. Some men won't face life. They prefer the ease of service in which there is no necessity for responsibility, to the strenuous activities which freedom ever demands. Such choosing of bondage is always ignoble. It should, however, be carefully noted that this is not the choice here indicated. It is rather that of a yielding to the claims of love. The servant has gained wife and children from his master. His master has earned his love. Rather than go out into personal freedom, he chooses to abide with his loved ones, and to serve a master whom he loves. There is nothing ignoble in such action. Then service becomes noble. There is no higher exercise of freedom than that of choosing to serve in love.

### Exodus 21:7 "If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do."

NET Exodus 21:7 "If a man sells his daughter as a female servant, she will not go out as the male servants do."

NLT Exodus 21:7 "When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she will not be freed at the end of six years as the men are."

ESV Exodus 21:7 "When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do."

LXE Exodus 21:7 And if any one sell his daughter as a domestic, she shall not depart as the maid-servants depart."

KJV Exodus 21:7 And if a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant, she shall not go out as the menservants do."

NIV Exodus 21:7 "If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do."

ASV Exodus 21:7 And if a man sell his daughter to be a maid-servant, she shall not go out as the menservants do."

CSB Exodus 21:7 "When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she is not to leave as the male slaves do."

- **sells:** Ne 5:5
- **to go free:** Ex 21:2,3
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FATE OF A FEMALE SLAVE

**Constable** notes that "Verses 7–11 describe a girl whom her father sells as a servant (Heb. 'amah, v. 7) for marriage, not for slavery."

**If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do-** This is a difficult passage, suggesting the daughter has no rights. These female slaves had rights and were protected by God's ordinances. And so in Ex 21:20 striking and killing a slave would be punished. In Ex 21:26 harm to a slave (specifically the eye) would result in the release of that slave from the master.

**NET Note** - This paragraph is troubling to modern readers, but given the way that marriages were contracted and the way people lived in the ancient world, it was a good provision for people who might want to find a better life for their daughter.

**John Currid** - The practice of selling minors is well attested in the ancient Near East. Parents who were in debt, or unable to support their families, sold children in the markets. This was a custom throughout the long history of Assyria and Babylonia. Letters from Amarna tell us that some people were forced to sell their children in order to get food to eat. In this section of Exodus we learn that Hebrew parents could sell their daughters into conditional slavery. This method of slavery is known from the Nuzi tablets. In the Old Testament, this girl is not a slave-girl in the usual sense that we understand the term. She is better protected, and is not to be treated as other slaves. **As we shall see in the following verses, the law presupposes that she will marry either her master or his son.** Therefore, she has the status of a married woman and she is to be treated kindly and with the utmost respect.

**Warren Wiersbe** on female slaves who were concubines - Well-to-do men sometimes had concubines who were looked upon as legal but "secondary" wives. The law protected them from being classified as ordinary slaves and saw to it they were given their rights (Deut. 21:10–14).



**Female slave** (maidservant)(01323)(**amah**) means a female servant, a maidservant (of Pharaoh's daughter - Ex 2:5), a slave girl. It can refer to a literal slave (Ex 21:10, 17; 20; Lev. 25:6; Job 31:13) and figuratively to those who call themselves by this term as an expression of humility (Ruth 3:9; Hannah in 1 Sa 1:16; Abigail in 1 Sa 25:24; 2 Sa 20:17) or as a token of the highest sense of submission when speaking to God (1 Sa 1:11; Ps. 86:16; Ps 116:16). In some contexts it can refer to a concubine (Ge 20:17; Ge 21:10, 12, Ge 30:3). Returning Israelites after the Exile counted these female servants among their possessions (Ezra 2:65). While the female slaves were to worship with their master's family in spiritual fellowship (Dt. 12:12, 18) they were still considered as possessions. **TWOT** adds that "A distinction was made between foreign slaves and Hebrew servants. The latter had more rights and freedoms (cf. Leviticus 25:44 and Deut. 15:12-18). But clearly, God expected his children to show kindness and consideration for the needs of these female slaves (Job 19:15; Job 31:13)."

**Amah** - 71x in 49v - female(15), female servant(4), female slave(2), handmaid(2), handmaids(1), maid(8), maids(5), maidservant(19), servant\*(1), servants\*(6), slave\*(4), slaves\*(4). Ge 20:17; Ge 21:10; Ge 21:12; Ge 21:13; Ge 30:3; Ge 31:33; Ex 2:5; Ex 20:10; Ex. 20:17; Ex 21:7; Ex 21:20; Ex. 21:26; Ex 21:27; Ex 21:32; Ex 23:12; Lev. 25:6; Lev. 25:44; Dt. 5:14; Dt. 5:21; Dt. 12:12; Dt. 12:18; Dt. 15:17; Dt. 16:11; Dt. 16:14; Jdg. 9:18; Jdg. 19:19; Ru 3:9; 1 Sa 1:11; 1 Sa 1:16; 1 Sa 25:24; 1 Sa 25:25; 1 Sa 25:28; 1 Sa 25:31; 1 Sa 25:41; 2 Sa 6:20; 2 Sa 6:22; 2 Sa 14:15; 2 Sa 14:16; 2 Sa 20:17; 1 Ki. 1:13; 1 Ki. 1:17; 1 Ki. 3:20; Ezra 2:65; Neh. 7:67; Job 19:15; Job 31:13; Ps. 86:16; Ps. 116:16; Nah. 2:7

#### Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible teach about human trafficking? | GotQuestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org/What-does-the-Bible-teach-about-human-trafficking/)

**Exodus 21:8 "If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her.**

NET Exodus 21:8 If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to a foreign nation, because he has dealt deceitfully with her.

NLT Exodus 21:8 If she does not satisfy her owner, he must allow her to be bought back again. But he is not allowed to sell her to foreigners, since he is the one who broke the contract with her.

ESV Exodus 21:8 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.

LXE Exodus 21:8 If she be not pleasing to her master, after she has betrothed herself to him, he shall let her go free; but he is not at liberty to sell her to a foreign nation, because he has trifled with her.

KJV Exodus 21:8 If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her.

NIV Exodus 21:8 If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her.

ASV Exodus 21:8 If she please not her master, who hath espoused her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a foreign people he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her.

CSB Exodus 21:8 If she is displeasing to her master, who chose her for himself, then he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners because he has acted treacherously toward her.

NKJ Exodus 21:8 "If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her.

NRS Exodus 21:8 If she does not please her master, who 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 dealt unfairly with her.

YLT Exodus 21:8 if evil in the eyes of her lord, so that he hath not betrothed her, then he hath let her be ransomed; to a strange people he hath not power to sell her, in his dealing treacherously with her.

NAB Exodus 21:8 But if her master, who had destined her for himself, dislikes her, he shall let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to a foreigner, since he has broken faith with her.

NJB Exodus 21:8 If she does not please her master who intended her for himself, he must let her be bought back: he has not the right to sell her to foreigners, for this would be a breach of faith with her.

- **If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master** Heb. be evil in the eyes of, etc. Ge 28:8 Jud 14:3 1Sa 8:6 18:8 \*marg:
- **who designated her for himself:** De 20:7 21:11-14
- seeing: Ex 8:29 Jud 9:19 Job 6:15 Mal 2:11-15
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FATE OF A DISPLEASING FEMALE SLAVE

**If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master-** NLT = "If she does not satisfy her owner." The Hebrew more literally reads "be evil in the eyes of" or "unpleasant in the eyes of her master." This law was designed to protect the Hebrew girl who had been sold in Ex 21:7.

**John Currid** - The Hebrew term for '**displeasing**' is quite general and relative. It does not necessarily mean that the woman has broken the law, nor does it indicate moral turpitude. It may simply indicate that in the master's view the woman is not what he wants. If he no longer desires her, then he must make certain she goes free

**Who designated her for himself** - NIV = "the master who has selected her for himself." CSB = "who chose her for himself." The KJV has "who hath betrothed her to himself" but the Hebrew verb ya'ad has the basic meaning of to appoint and so can mean to designate. As the NET Note says "When he bought the girl, he designated her for himself, giving her and her family certain expectations." It should be noted that the Septuagint uses a verb **kathomologeō** meaning to confess, allow, to promise and in some cases to betroth.

**Wiersbe** - If after becoming the man's concubine (THAT SHE IS A [CONCUBINE](#) IS NOT DEFINITELY STATED) she didn't please him, somebody in her birth family could redeem her and she would be set free. (Be Delivered)

**Then he shall let her be redeemed** - To redeem means to pay a price to set her free. The text does not say who would pay the price, but presumably her father.

**Redeemed** (06299)([padah](#)) means to ransom, buy and so to cause the freedom or release of a person from bondage or ownership, often implying a delivering or rescue of a person in distress. The basic meaning of the Hebrew root is to achieve the transfer of ownership from one to another through payment of a price or an equivalent substitute.

**He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people** - He was prohibited from selling her to another master, specifically a foreign one. Slaves of the pagans would not be treated like slaves of the Hebrews who were guided by these divine ordinances.

**Because of his unfairness to her** - Unfairness speaks of acting or dealing treacherously with the girl. NET = "he has dealt deceitfully with her." NLT = "since he is the one who broke the contract with her." "The deceit is in not making her his wife or concubine as the arrangement had stipulated." (NET Note)

**Exodus 21:9 "If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters.**

NET Exodus 21:9 If he designated her for his son, then he will deal with her according to the customary rights of daughters.

NLT Exodus 21:9 But if the slave's owner arranges for her to marry his son, he may no longer treat her as a slave but as a daughter.

ESV Exodus 21:9 If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter.

LXE Exodus 21:9 And if he should have betrothed her to his son, he shall do to her according to the right of daughters.

KJV Exodus 21:9 And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.

NIV Exodus 21:9 If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

ASV Exodus 21:9 And if he espouse her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.

CSB Exodus 21:9 Or if he chooses her for his son, he must deal with her according to the customary treatment of daughters.

NKJ Exodus 21:9 "And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters.

NRS Exodus 21:9 If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter.

YLT Exodus 21:9 'And if to his son he betroth her, according to the right of daughters he doth to her.

NAB Exodus 21:9 If he destines her for his son, he shall treat her like a daughter.

NJB Exodus 21:9 If he intends her for his son, he must treat her as custom requires daughters to be treated.

- **designates her for his son** Ex 22:17 Ge 38:11 Lev 22:13
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **RIGHT OF A SLAVE GIRL GIVEN TO ONE'S SON**

**If he designates her for his son** - NIV = "If he selects her for his son." NLB = "If he intends her for his son." This ordinance addresses a master who decides to give his slave girl to his son, presumably in marriage. Once the master appoints the slave girl for his son, she is thereafter considered to be part of the family household.

**He shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters** - NLT = "he may no longer treat her as a slave but as a daughter." CSB = "he must deal with her according to the customary treatment of daughters." If the slave girl becomes the master's daughter-in-law, she is not to be treated as if she is still a slave. She is to be treated as if she were one of his own daughters..

**Currid** notes that "the expression '**according to the custom of daughters**' means much more than that, because it is a technical, legal phrase meaning 'to treat as a free-born woman'. That is to say, full citizenship rights are granted to her."

**Exodus 21:10 "If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.**

NET Exodus 21:10 If he takes another wife, he must not diminish the first one's food, her clothing, or her marital rights.

NLT Exodus 21:10 "If a man who has married a slave wife takes another wife for himself, he must not neglect the rights of the first wife to food, clothing, and sexual intimacy.

ESV Exodus 21:10 If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights.

LXE Exodus 21:10 And if he take another to himself, he shall not deprive her of necessaries and her apparel, and her companionship with him.

KJV Exodus 21:10 If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

NIV Exodus 21:10 If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights.

ASV Exodus 21:10 If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish.

CSB Exodus 21:10 If he takes an additional wife, he must not reduce the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife.

NKJ Exodus 21:10 "If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights.

NRS Exodus 21:10 If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife.

YLT Exodus 21:10 'If another woman he take for him, her food, her covering, and her habitation, he doth not withdraw;

NAB Exodus 21:10 If he takes another wife, he shall not withhold her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

NJB Exodus 21:10 If he takes another wife, he must not reduce the food, clothing or conjugal rights of the first one.

GWN Exodus 21:10 If that son marries another woman, he must not deprive the first wife of food, clothes, or sex.

- **her food:** 1Co 7:1-6
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PROTECTION FOR THE FIRST WOMAN

**If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights**(cf 1 Cor. 7:1–6) - NLT has "If a man who has married a slave wife takes another wife for himself, he must not neglect the rights of the first wife to food, clothing, and sexual intimacy."

**NET Note** - The translation of "food" does not quite do justice to the Hebrew word. It is "flesh." The issue here is that the family she was to marry into is wealthy, they ate meat. She was not just to be given the basic food the ordinary people ate, but the fine foods that this family ate.

**Currid on conjugal rights** - The sense of the latter term is uncertain. This is the only instance of its use. The Septuagint and other early versions understand it to refer to cohabitation, or conjugal rights. A few modern translations (such as the NASB) still hold to that idea. However, there is no linguistic basis for it.

**Food** (07607)(**sheer**) is masculine noun meaning flesh, food, meat, body, self, blood relative, blood kindred. Gilbrant - "Sheer seems to mean "food" in Ex. 21:10 and "food" or "meat" in Ps. 78:20, where it is paralleled by lechem (bread) refers to tearing off of the flesh of God's people (Mic. 3:2), when the rich are oppressing the poor. It can stand for the frail physical aspects of being human as opposed to God's enduring support for us (Ps. 73:26; Pr 5:11). The noun refers to the actual mistreatment of the body or flesh of the Israelites by the Babylonians (Jer. 51:35)." It can mean "kinship, a relative, even close relations (Lev 18:6). Sexual relations were forbidden with a person's paternal aunt because she was literally considered a parent's "flesh" (Lev. 18:12f; 21:2)." (Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary)

**NIDOTTE** - OT 1. Ps 78:20, 27 uses the word of the quail **meat** God provided for the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness (cf. Ex 16:13; Nu 11:31). In a scathing denunciation of socioeconomic injustice, Micah (Mic 3:1–3) accused Israel's rulers of tearing his oppressed people's **flesh** from their bones and eating it. This imagery of cannibalism highlights in a vivid, albeit hyperbolic manner, the cruel unjust measures enacted by the rich against the poor. See J. Mays, Micah, 1976, 79. 2. Ps 73:26 and Prov 5:11 view human **שָׁרֵף** as the seat of physical strength and vitality. The psalmist of Ps 73 declares his confidence that even if his strength (flesh) grows weak, God is capable of sustaining him. Though some understand the statement, in conjunction with v. 24, as the psalmist's hope for the afterlife (cf. M. Dahood, Psalms, 1968, 2:195–96), this seems unlikely in the context of the Psalter. Verse 24 probably anticipates the psalmist's vindication in this life, and "fail" (v. 26) need not refer to death per se, but can describe the physical weakness characteristic of those approaching death (cf. Job 33:21; Ps 71:9; 143:7; Prov 5:11).

**Sheer** - 17x - blood relative(4), blood relatives(2), body(1), flesh(4), food(1), himself(1), meat(2), relative(1), relatives(1). Exod. 21:10; Lev. 18:6; Lev. 18:12; Lev. 18:13; Lev. 18:17; Lev. 20:19; Lev. 21:2; Lev. 25:49; Num. 27:11; Ps. 73:26; Ps. 78:20; Ps. 78:27; Prov. 5:11; Prov. 11:17; Jer. 51:35; Mic. 3:2; Mic. 3:3

**Exodus 21:11 "If he will not do these three things for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.**

NET Exodus 21:11 If he does not provide her with these three things, then she will go out free, without paying money.

NLT Exodus 21:11 If he fails in any of these three obligations, she may leave as a free woman without making any payment.

ESV Exodus 21:11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

LXE Exodus 21:11 And if he will not do these three things to her, she shall go out free without money.

KJV Exodus 21:11 And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money.

NIV Exodus 21:11 If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

ASV Exodus 21:11 And if he do not these three things unto her, then shall she go out for nothing, without money.

CSB Exodus 21:11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she may leave free of charge, without any exchange of money.

NKJ Exodus 21:11 "And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money.

NRS Exodus 21:11 And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.

YLT Exodus 21:11 and if these three he do not to her, then she hath gone out for nought, without money.

NAB Exodus 21:11 If he does not grant her these three things, she shall be given her freedom absolutely, without cost to her.

NJB Exodus 21:11 Should he deprive her of these three things she will leave a free woman, without paying compensation.

GWN Exodus 21:11 If he doesn't give her these three things, she can go free, without paying any money for her freedom.

- Ex 21:2
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **MASTERS WHO FAIL TO PROVIDE FORFEIT THEIR FEMALE SLAVE!**

**If he will not do these three things for her**- This is a conditional clause which serves to protect the female slaves. The **three things** refers to **her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights**. NLT = "If he fails in any of these three obligations." In this section we see that God is clearly concerned for the rights of the women and does not want them abused or mistreated, and if they are there will be [retribution](#).

**Then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money**- NLT = "she may leave as a free woman without making any payment."

**NET Note** - Women, who were often at the mercy of their husbands or masters, must not be trapped in an unfortunate situation, but be treated well by their masters or husbands (vv. 7–11). God is preventing people who have power over others from abusing it.

**Exodus 21:12 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.**

NET Exodus 21:12 "Whoever strikes someone so that he dies must surely be put to death.

NLT Exodus 21:12 "Anyone who assaults and kills another person must be put to death.

ESV Exodus 21:12 "Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

LXE Exodus 21:12 And if any man smite another and he die, let him be certainly put to death.

KJV Exodus 21:12 He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.

NIV Exodus 21:12 "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.

ASV Exodus 21:12 He that smiteth a man, so that he dieth, shall surely be put to death.

CSB Exodus 21:12 "Whoever strikes a person so that he dies must be put to death.

NKJ Exodus 21:12 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

NRS Exodus 21:12 Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death.

YLT Exodus 21:12 'He who smiteth a man so that he hath died, is certainly put to death;

- Ex 20:13 Ge 9:6 Lev 24:17 Nu 35:16-24,30,31 De 19:11-13 2Sa 12:13 Mt 26:52
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SANCTITY OF LIFE IS AFFIRMED

The laws in Exodus 21:12-17 deal with homicide and are related to the Sixth Commandment in Ex 20:13.

**He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death-** "You shall not murder" (Ex 20:13, Lev 24:17) and here God gives the clear penalty for murder. Tragically in our modern justice system we have tended to "soften" God's instructions regarding the murder penalty. The same Hebrew word [muth](#) is used for "**he dies**" and "**put to death.**"

In Numbers we see an additional detail that must be met in order to put a man to death

If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. 31'Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. (Nu 35:30-31)

Even before the Law was written by Moses, God had given a clear command that murderers were to be punished.

Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

**Comment** - This passage is in essence the law of retribution (lex talionis). Since we are made in God's image, murder of one of His creations is an attack on the **image of God**. God is the Creator of life and He Alone has the right over life. Of course when He instructs putting a man to death for taking a life, that is completely within God's sovereign right and in keeping with His perfect justice. Even in this command, we see that God extended mercy to Cain who killed his brother, to Moses who killed an Egyptian and to David who conspired to have Bathsheba's husband murdered. But in each of those cases it was God Who extended the mercy.

**Currid** asks "What does this mean for us today? Does capital punishment apply to today's society, or has it been abrogated? It is frequently argued in popular culture that the Sixth Commandment, 'You shall not kill,' nullifies capital punishment. The idea of killing a killer would be as heinous as the murder itself. As we have seen, however, the prohibition of the Sixth Commandment clearly applies only to murder, and not to judicial executions. In fact, as we have just seen, the Mosaic law plainly teaches capital punishment for a variety of offences. In other words, it directly sanctions the death penalty."

Related Resources:

- [Why is "You shall not murder" in the Ten Commandments? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Why did God mandate capital punishment for murder \(Genesis 9:6\)? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Does God killing people make Him a murderer? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What does the Bible say about killing in war? Is killing in war a sin? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [Are all sins equal to God? Is all sin the same?](#)

**Exodus 21:13 "But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.**

NET Exodus 21:13 But if he does not do it with premeditation, but it happens by accident, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.



NLT Exodus 21:13 But if it was simply an accident permitted by God, I will appoint a place of refuge where the slayer can run for safety.

ESV Exodus 21:13 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.

LXE Exodus 21:13 But as for him that did it not willingly, but God delivered him into his hands, I will give thee a place whither the slayer may flee.

KJV Exodus 21:13 And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

NIV Exodus 21:13 However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate.

ASV Exodus 21:13 And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

CSB Exodus 21:13 But if he didn't intend any harm, and yet God caused it to happen by his hand, I will appoint a place for you where he may flee.

NKJ Exodus 21:13 "However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

NRS Exodus 21:13 If it was not premeditated, but came about by an act of God, then I will appoint for you a place to which the killer may flee.

YLT Exodus 21:13 as to him who hath not laid wait, and God hath brought to his hand, I have even set for thee a place whither he doth flee.

NAB Exodus 21:13 He, however, who did not hunt a man down, but caused his death by an act of God, may flee to a place which I will set apart for this purpose.

NJB Exodus 21:13 If, however, he has not planned to do it but it comes from God by his hand, he can take refuge in a place which I shall appoint for you.

- **he did not lie** Nu 35:11,22 De 19:4-6,11 Mic 7:2
- **God let him fall into his hand:** 1Sa 24:4,10,18 2Sa 16:10 Isa 10:7
- **I will appoint:** Nu 35:11 De 4:41-43 19:1-3,9 Jos 20:2-9
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **PENALTY FOR A KILLING WHICH IS "ACCIDENTAL"**

The law clearly differentiated between premeditated murder and manslaughter. This was distinct from the Code of Hammurabi which allowed capital punishment for manslaughter.

**But if he did not lie in wait for him** - That is this was not "premeditated murder."

**but God let him fall into his hand** - NLT = " an accident permitted by God" The point is that the man did not intend to kill the other man, but this tragic event was the result of circumstances outside his control (but clearly under the power of the sovereign God).

**Currid** points out that "The purpose of this law is to stop the ancient custom of blood vengeance (cf. Deut. 4:41–43; 19:11–13). How the act of blood vengeance works in a tribal society is starkly illustrated in the killing of Joab in 1 Kings 2:28–34." (Ibid)

**then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee**- NLT = " I will appoint a place of refuge where the slayer can run for safety." In Nu 35:11–15 there were six cities of refuge throughout the land of Palestine in convenient locations so that one charged with manslaughter could avail himself of the shelter they afforded until the matter in which he was involved could be settled.

**Adam Clarke** - From the earliest times the nearest akin had a right to revenge the murder of his relation, and as this right was universally acknowledged, no law was ever made on the subject; but as this might be abused, and a person who had killed another accidentally, having had no previous malice against him, might be put to death by the avenger of blood, as the nearest kinsman was termed, therefore God provided the cities of refuge to which the accidental manslayer might flee till the affair was inquired into, and settled by the civil magistrate.

**Wiersbe** points out that "Israel didn't have a police force; the family of the victim was expected to see that justice was done. But in the heat of anger, they might be more interested in revenge than in justice, so the law stepped in to protect the accused until he was proved guilty." (Be Delivered)

#### Related Resources:

- Application of truth of Blood Avenger in the New Testament - [Jesus Our Kinsman Redeemer and Blood Avenger](#)
- [What were the cities of refuge in the Old Testament? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What does the Bible say about seeking/granting asylum?](#)

**Exodus 21:14 "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.**

NET Exodus 21:14 But if a man willfully attacks his neighbor to kill him cunningly, you will take him even from my altar that he may die.

NLT Exodus 21:14 However, if someone deliberately kills another person, then the slayer must be dragged even from my altar and be put to death.

ESV Exodus 21:14 But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.

LXE Exodus 21:14 And if any one lie in wait for his neighbour to slay him by craft, and he go for refuge, thou shalt take him from my altar to put him to death.

KJV Exodus 21:14 But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

NIV Exodus 21:14 But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.

ASV Exodus 21:14 And if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.

CSB Exodus 21:14 If a person schemes and willfully acts against his neighbor to murder him, you must take him from My altar to be put to death.

NKJ Exodus 21:14 "But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

NRS Exodus 21:14 But if someone willfully attacks and kills another by treachery, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution.

YLT Exodus 21:14 'And when a man doth presume against his neighbour to slay him with subtilty, from Mine altar thou dost take him to die

- **presumptuously**: Nu 15:30,31 De 1:43 17:12,13 18:22 19:11-13 1Ki 2:29-34 Ps 19:13 Heb 10:26 2Pe 2:10
- **to kill him craftily**: Nu 35:20,21 De 27:24 2Sa 3:27 20:9,10
- **take him**: 1Ki 1:50,51 1 Ki 2:28-34 2Ki 11:15
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### NO REFUGE FOR WILLFUL MURDER

**If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor** - CSB = "If a person schemes and willfully acts against his neighbor."

**Presumptuously** (02102)(**zud**) means to boil up, seethe, act proudly or presumptuously or rebelliously. Figuratively be insolent. Egyptians's arrogant, proud treatment of the Israelites (Ex. 18:11; Neh 9:10) Israel's disrespect and presumptuous actions toward God's commands are described using the word (Deut. 1:43; 17:13; Neh. 9:16).

**TWOT** - zîd is frequently used to refer to three specific aspects of pride. **One** is presumption. Because a person is proud he presumes too much in his favor, especially in the sense of authority. For instance, the false prophet was one who presumed to speak in the name of God, assuming authority to do so, without having been called (Deut. 18:20; cf. Deut. 18:22 for use of the noun derivative). False gods, too, are spoken of as presuming authority for themselves (Exodus 18:11); and Babylon is said to have claimed too much for herself as against the Holy One of Israel (Jeremiah 50:29). Egyptians assumed the same in subjecting the Israelites to bondage (Neh. 9:10). The **second** aspect is rebellion or disobedience. Because the person is proud he asserts his own will to the point of rebelling against one in authority over him. The Israelites so asserted themselves against God when they chose to fight the Canaanites, even though God told them not to do so (Deut. 1:43). The same thought is contained in Neh. 9:16, 29. Eliab, David's older brother, accused him of having pride in coming to the Philistine battle scene (1 Samuel 17:28, where zādôn is used with the sense of hybris). The **third**, closely related to the second, carries the additional element of willful decision. If a person so asserted himself and killed his neighbor, his own life was required as punishment. If the slaying was unintentional, however, a place of refuge was available for him (Exodus 21:14). Indeed, if a person willfully disobeyed the priest, whether murder was involved or not, he had to die (Deut. 17:12-13, where both zid and zādôn appear). This seems to explain David's distinction between "hidden" (KJV "secret") and "presumptuous" sins (Psalm 19:12-13 [H 13-14]). He prays that he may be cleansed from the "hidden," thus admitting his guilt in that respect; but asks that he may be kept from the "presumptuous."

**Z u d** - 10v - act presumptuously(1), acted arrogantly(3), acted presumptuously(1), acts presumptuously(1), become arrogant(1), cooked(1), dealt proudly(1), presumptuously(1). Gen. 25:29; Exod. 18:11; Exod. 21:14; Deut. 1:43; Deut. 17:13; Deut. 18:20; Neh. 9:10; Neh. 9:16; Neh. 9:29; Jer. 50:29

**So as to kill him craftily** - In other words he uses cunning or treachery to kill his neighbor. There is no provision of a place of refuge for one who is guilty of premeditated murder, in this case killing as result of a plan of guile and deceit.

**NET Note on craftily** - The use here seems parallel to the one in Josh 9:4, an instance involving intentionality and clever deception.

**Craftily** (06195)(ormah - see another study on ormah) has positive (prudence) and negative (shrewdness) connotations. The negative sense means to be cunning, crafty or or deceptive and one who intentionally, craftily, schemed to murder his neighbor was to be put to death (Ex. 21:14). The Gibeonites resorted to deceptive shrewdness against Joshua by sending a delegation who pretended to be from a distant country in order to make a treaty so that the Israelites would not destroy them (Josh. 9:4). "Proverbs gives a more positive meaning to 'āremāh by stating that a primary purpose for the wise proverbs of Solomon was for "giving prudence to the simple" (Prov. 1:4, NIV). Later, Wisdom instructed readers that 'āremāh was a trait to be sought and kept, by calling out, "You who are simple, gain prudence" (Prov. 8:5, NIV), and "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence" (Prov. 8:12, NIV)." (Gilbrant)

**Ormah** - craftily(2), prudence(3). Exod. 21:14; Jos. 9:4; Prov. 1:4; Prov. 8:5; Prov. 8:12

**You are to take him even from My altar, that he may die**- There was no "place of safety" for a presumptuous murderer.

**Alan Cole** explains why they would take hold of God's altar - The supplicant would catch hold of the projecting 'horns' of the altar (1 Ki 2:28). This was tantamount to dedicating himself to YHWH, like any animal sacrifice bound with ropes to the altar horns. (TOTC-Ex)

**David Guzik** - God said also that unpunished murderers defiled the land: Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death ... So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel. (Numbers 35:31, 33-34). The principle that unpunished murders defile a land is a sobering, humbling thought among Americans, were so many are murdered and few are brought to justice for those murders.

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We see this law play out in the reign of King Solomon when he had several people killed for lack of loyalty (1 Ki 2:12-27)

Now the news came to Joab, for Joab had followed Adonijah (WHOM SOLOMON HAD EXECUTED), although he had not followed Absalom. And **Joab fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar.** 29 It was told King Solomon that Joab had fled to the tent of the LORD, and behold, he is beside the

**altar.** Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, **'Go, fall upon him.'** 30 So Benaiah came to the tent of the LORD and said to him, "Thus the king has said, 'Come out.'" But he said, "No, for I will die here." And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, "Thus spoke Joab, and thus he answered me." 31 The king said to him, "Do as he has spoken and fall upon him and bury him, that you may **remove from me and from my father's house the blood which Joab shed without cause.** 32 "The LORD will return his blood on his own head, because he (JOAB) fell upon two men more righteous and better than he and killed them with the sword, while my father David did not know it: **Abner** the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and **Amasa** the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. 33 "So shall their blood return on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever; but to David and his descendants and his house and his throne, may there be peace from the LORD forever." 34 Then Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and fell upon him and put him to death, and he was buried at his own house in the wilderness.(1 Ki 2:28-34)

#### Related Resources:

- [Who was Adonijah in the Bible?](#)
- [What was the true issue between Adonijah and Solomon over Abishag?](#)
- [Who was Joab in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [What is the story of Abner and Joab](#)

### Exodus 21:15 "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

NET Exodus 21:15 "Whoever strikes his father or his mother must surely be put to death.

NLT Exodus 21:15 "Anyone who strikes father or mother must be put to death.

ESV Exodus 21:15 "Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

LXE Exodus 21:15 Whoever smites his father or his mother, let him be certainly put to death.

KJV Exodus 21:15 And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.

NIV Exodus 21:15 "Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death.

ASV Exodus 21:15 And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.

CSB Exodus 21:15 "Whoever strikes his father or his mother must be put to death.

NKJ Exodus 21:15 "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

NRS Exodus 21:15 Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death.

YLT Exodus 21:15 'And he who smiteth his father or his mother is certainly put to death.

- De 21:18-21 27:24 Pr 30:11,17 1Ti 1:9
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### PENALTY FOR STRIKING PARENTS IS DEATH!

**He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death** - **Strike** implies an attack with considerable force. This is the opposite of the fifth commandment in Ex 20:12 and here instead of prolonging one's life, the penalty is shortening one's life. Note that the Septuagint helps understand the dynamic translates strikes with [tupto/typto](#) in the [present tense](#) indicating that this was not an isolated episode but reflected repeated rebellious behavior. And like leaven, this needed to be removed from the community. There were no special rules for "minors" or "juveniles" as we have in our society today, and thus they were punished as if they were adults.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 "If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, 19 then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. 20"They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' 21"Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.

**Constable** notes that "The Code of Hammurabi specified that the person who struck his father should have his hands cut off. The Torah took a stronger position requiring the death of the person who struck either parent. The reason seems to be that by doing so the striker did not honor his parents but revolted against God's ordained authority over him or her (v. 15; cf. 20:12)."

**Currid** adds that "Parental authority carries divine protection and sanction. The Bible sets great store by the precept of honouring parents—this is a case law reflecting the Fifth Commandment." (Ibid)

**T. Scott** - To smite either father or mother, in a manner which indicated either contempt or malice, or left marks of violence, was deemed a proof of so ungrateful and unnatural a disposition, that no provocation was admitted as an excuse, but the offence was made capital: nay, he who cursed his father or mother, who uttered imprecations, ill wishes, or revilings, against a parent, was included in the same sense; though few crimes were made capital by the law of Moses. The law of God, as delegated to parents is honoured when they are honoured, and despised when they are despised: and to rebel against the lawful exercise of this authority is rebellion against God.

**Exodus 21:16 "He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death."**

NET Exodus 21:16 "Whoever kidnaps someone and sells him, or is caught still holding him, must surely be put to death.

NLT Exodus 21:16 "Kidnappers must be put to death, whether they are caught in possession of their victims or have already sold them as slaves.

ESV Exodus 21:16 "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

LXE Exodus 21:16 Whosoever shall steal one of the children of Israel, and prevail over him and sell him, and he be found with him, let him certainly die.

KJV Exodus 21:16 And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

NIV Exodus 21:16 "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.

ASV Exodus 21:16 And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

CSB Exodus 21:16 "Whoever kidnaps a person must be put to death, whether he sells him or the person is found in his possession.

NKJ Exodus 21:16 "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death.

NRS Exodus 21:16 Whoever kidnaps a person, whether that person has been sold or is still held in possession, shall be put to death.

YLT Exodus 21:16 'And he who stealeth a man, and hath sold him, and he hath been found in his hand, is certainly put to death.

- **He who kidnaps a man:** Ge 40:15 De 24:7 1Ti 1:10 Rev 18:12
- **whether he sells him:** Ge 37:28
- **found in his possession:** Ex 22:4
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **PENALTY FOR KIDNAPPING IS DEATH!**

**He who kidnaps a man** - Literally "a stealer of a man" which breaks the commandment in Ex 20:15 "You shall not steal." In context this refers to an Israelite man who has been kidnapped. "If it's wrong to steal property (Ex. 20:15), then it's an even greater crime to steal people made in God's image and to sell them as slaves." (Wiersbe)

Deuteronomy 24:7 "If a man is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he deals

with him violently or sells him, then that thief shall die; so you shall purge the evil from among you.

**Walter Kaiser** - Kidnapping is not a property offense since no property offense draws a capital punishment, and this law is not listed under property laws. Instead, it is the theft of a human being. (EBC-Ex)

**Currid** - The death penalty for kidnapping reflects the biblical teaching of the value, worth and dignity of man in God's image. It is appropriate punishment because kidnapping is an assault on the concept of the person created in the image of God. Kidnapping displays deep-rooted contempt for God and his image-bearers. One of the main purposes for kidnapping is stated—that is, for the slave trade.

**Whether he sells him** - This very scenario was played out in the life of Joseph!

**David Guzik** - This is a subtle yet important difference between slavery as it was (and is) commonly practiced and slavery as regulated in the Bible. Most slavery (ancient and modern) was actually a form of kidnapping—the taking and imprisoning of a person against their will. As regulated in the Bible (and as practiced in some other ancient cultures), slavery was received willingly (usually as payment for debt) or, in the case of war, was an alternative to death. In ancient Israel, other cultures were not kidnapped and enslaved (as was the practice in the African slave trade).

**Or he is found in his possession** - Literally "and he is found in his hand," which makes me think of the idiom ["caught red-handed."](#) The point is that the kidnapper was caught before he could sell his captive.

**Shall surely be put to death** - This would surely put a damper on men's temptation to kidnap another Hebrew!

### Exodus 21:17 "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

NET Exodus 21:17 "Whoever treats his father or his mother disgracefully must surely be put to death.

NLT Exodus 21:17 "Anyone who dishonors father or mother must be put to death.

ESV Exodus 21:17 "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

LXE Exodus 21:17 He that reviles his father or his mother shall surely die.

KJV Exodus 21:17 And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

NIV Exodus 21:17 "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

ASV Exodus 21:17 And he that curseth his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

CSB Exodus 21:17 "Whoever curses his father or his mother must be put to death.

NKJ Exodus 21:17 "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

NRS Exodus 21:17 Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death.

YLT Exodus 21:17 'And he who is reviling his father or his mother is certainly put to death.

- **He who curses his father**, Lev 20:9 De 27:16 Pr 20:20 30:11,17 Mt 15:3-6 Mk 7:10,11
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## CURSING PARENTS A CAPITAL CRIME

Parallel passages:

Leviticus 20:9 'If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.

Deuteronomy 27:16 'Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 "If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, 19 then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. 20 "They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.' 21 "Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your



midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.

**He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death** - Cursing is the antithesis of honoring one's parents in Ex 20:12+. There is an interesting play on Hebrew words here for **honor** in Ex 20:12 is [kabad](#) which means to weigh heavily, whereas the Hebrew verb qalal for cursing means to regard lightly or make light of. So instead of honoring their parents, they dishonor them, treating them "lightly" or with [contempt](#). The passage however does not specifically state how a child curses his parents. However as explained below this is not a casual curse word spoken against the parents but reflects habitual rebellion (see [present tense](#) below). This passage is quoted in part by Jesus in Matthew 15:4 and Mark 7:10 (see below). The reason the punishment was so serious is because this type of behavior was considered to be an expression of rebellion against God's authority. And since the family was the basic unit of a society, it was critical that it's integrity be stringently maintained.

It is easier to see this in the Septuagint which translates curse with the verb **katalogeo** which literally means to speak evil of and in the [present tense](#) indicates that this was the son's habitual, ongoing behavior. He was continually using unjustified and abusive language against his parents.

**Katalogeo** is used by Jesus in the NT (note one begins "God said" and the other "Moses said" indicating that what Moses said was the Word of God)...

Matthew 15:4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' (QUOTING Ex 20:12) and, 'HE WHO **SPEAKS EVIL** (katalogeo in [present tense](#)) OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' (QUOTING Ex 21:17).

Mark 7:10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO **SPEAKS EVIL** (katalogeo in [present tense](#)) OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH';

**Alan Cole** - "Since to curse was to will and pray the downfall of the other with all one's heart, it represented the attitude from which sprang acts like striking or murder." (TOTC-Ex)

**David Guzik** - The Law of Moses also had a built-in protection for the rights of the child, according to Deuteronomy 21:18–21. This passage states that the parent did not have the right to carry out this punishment, but they were required to bring the accused child before the elders and judges of the city. This meant that the parent—against all contemporary custom—did not have the absolute power of life and death over their children. As a practical matter, the judges of Israel rarely if ever administered the death penalty in such cases, yet the child was held accountable.

**Douglas Stuart** - Most likely this law envisions a situation in which someone would not merely in a moment of rage say to his parents something like "I wish you were dead!" but would publicly, perhaps by an oath spoken in the name of Yahweh, assert that he wanted never again to have anything to do with his parents and would not respect or serve them any longer as their child, wishing only harm for them. Thus the curser would, carrying out the curse, neither obey his parents nor care for them in their old age as was the expected duty but would openly declare something to the effect that he wanted them "out of the way. Such behavior was sufficiently outrageous that God would not tolerate its continuation within the covenant community, and he therefore declared it a capital crime. (New American Commentary – Volume 2: Exodus)

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**Question:** "[Does the Bible really say that parents should have their rebellious children stoned?](#)"

**Answer:** This is one of those "Yes, but..." questions that require serious explaining.

**Leviticus 20:9** says,

"If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him."

First, a note on the last part of the verse. **'His bloodguiltiness is upon him'** basically means that he brought this punishment on himself. He knew what he was supposed to do, and he didn't do it. Also, it is important to remember that the Mosaic Law was for God's covenant people, Israel, living in a theocracy. The Old Testament Law is not in force today (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23–25; Ephesians 2:15).

**Deuteronomy 21:18–21 expands on the law:**

If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his home town. And they shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear of it and fear.

The context of a passage is crucial to understanding what it means. Taking these two verses by themselves, one could come away with a negative attitude toward God and His Word. In the Leviticus passage, this law is part of a section dealing with egregious sins, sins that would tear a nation and family apart. The trespass in question was not a casual, slip-of-the-tongue curse, but a deep-seated rebellion, an ongoing attitude of hatred that had to be dealt with severely. In other words, the punishment was not for minor infractions but for determined defiance.

There are several things to keep in mind about this particular sin and about the law:

1. The sin was ongoing and continuous. Deuteronomy 21:18 indicates that the punishment was only meted out after a persistent refusal to heed both father and mother and after all discipline had failed. The parents have tried to deal with their son in a loving, firm way, but nothing worked.
2. It was deep-seated sin. Verse 20 specifies that the son is stubborn in his rebellion. Not only is he recalcitrant, "he is a glutton and a drunkard." This is not a case of a child who misses curfew or plays ball in the house. This was a true menace, a child who is causing trouble in society and grieving his parents, possibly to the point of endangering them physically and financially.
3. The punishment was not an impulsive act of anger or vengeance. Verse 19 says that the city elders had to oversee the case and determine the guilt of the child. It is only after the elders pronounced a sentence of death that the execution could take place. The law did not allow an angry parent to arbitrarily stone a child. A modern equivalent of this is when a parent sees news footage of his child committing a crime and subsequently turns the child in to the police. If parents know their child is acting in a way that endangers society, they are responsible to obey the civil authorities and report the crime.
4. The punishment was designed to preserve the nation. As verse 21 explains, the reason for this law was to purge evil from society and act as a deterrent to further rebellion. Israel was a nation chosen by God to be holy (Exodus 20:6). **God gave the Israelites three types of laws: judicial, moral, and ceremonial. This is a judicial law. A child who was actively and deliberately rejecting the laws of the land needed to be punished judicially.**

Which brings us to the last and most important factor:

Rebellion against one's parents is direct rebellion against God. The 5th Command is to honor one's father and mother (Exodus 20:12). Parents are a God-ordained authority. Disobedience to parents is disobedience to God (Ephesians 6:1-3). Throughout the Bible, there are only a handful of things we are told to fear: God (Proverbs 1:7) and parents (Leviticus 19:3) are among them.

The law requiring rebellious children to be stoned to death was meant for extreme cases to protect God's people. It would have been heartbreaking for parents to bear the responsibility of initiating such severe measures. However, the Bible never records this law being enforced. (Source: [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org))

**Exodus 21:18 "If men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but remains in bed,**

NET Exodus 21:18 "If men fight, and one strikes his neighbor with a stone or with his fist and he does not die, but must remain in bed,

NLT Exodus 21:18 "Now suppose two men quarrel, and one hits the other with a stone or fist, and the injured person does not die but is confined to bed.

ESV Exodus 21:18 "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,

LXE Exodus 21:18 And if two men revile each other and smite the one the other with a stone or his fist, and he die not, but be laid upon his bed;

KJV Exodus 21:18 And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed:

NIV Exodus 21:18 "If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and he does not die but is confined to bed,

ASV Exodus 21:18 And if men contend, and one smite the other with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keep his bed;

CSB Exodus 21:18 "When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or his fist, and the injured man

does not die but is confined to bed,

NKJ Exodus 21:18 "If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed,

NRS Exodus 21:18 When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed,

YLT Exodus 21:18 'And when men contend, and a man hath smitten his neighbour with a stone, or with the fist, and he die not, but hath fallen on the bed;

- **If men have a quarrel:** Ex 21:22 Ex 2:13 De 25:11 2Sa 14:6
- **a stone:** Ex 21:20 Nu 35:16-24
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## QUARRELING LEADING TO FIGHTING

**If men have a quarrel** - The Septuagint has [loidoreo](#) in [present tense](#) depicting this as ongoing hurling of verbal abuse at each other, reviling, reproaching, and shouting insults. This is a setting in which anger begins to boil over and the verbal volleys become physical volleys, so to speak.

**And one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but remains in bed**- The fight does not kill one party but does result in serious injury so they cannot work. The one who "won the fight" (so to speak) would end up being the loser. See Ex 21:19.

**Exodus 21:19 if he gets up and walks around outside on his staff, then he who struck him shall go unpunished; he shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take care of him until he is completely healed.**

NET Exodus 21:19 and then if he gets up and walks about outside on his staff, then the one who struck him is innocent, except he must pay for the injured person's loss of time and see to it that he is fully healed.

NLT Exodus 21:19 If he is later able to walk outside again, even with a crutch, the assailant will not be punished but must compensate his victim for lost wages and provide for his full recovery.

ESV Exodus 21:19 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.

LXE Exodus 21:19 if the man arise and walk abroad on his staff, he that smote him shall be clear; only he shall pay for his loss of time, and for his healing.

KJV Exodus 21:19 If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.

NIV Exodus 21:19 the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff; however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.

ASV Exodus 21:19 if he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.

CSB Exodus 21:19 if he can later get up and walk around outside leaning on his staff, then the one who struck him will be exempt from punishment. Nevertheless, he must pay for his lost work time and provide for his complete recovery.

NKJ Exodus 21:19 "if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time, and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed.

NRS Exodus 21:19 but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for full recovery.

YLT Exodus 21:19 if he rise, and hath gone up and down without on his staff, then hath the smiter been acquitted; only his cessation he giveth, and he is thoroughly healed.

- **walks around outside on his staff:** 2Sa 3:29 Zec 8:4
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## COMPENSATION FOR THE INJURED PARTY

**If he gets up and walks around outside on his staff** - This describes the one previously bedridden now able to walk about on a crutch, indicating he was recovering from the injury.

**Then he who struck him shall go unpunished** - There would be no physical punishment for the "winner" of the fight.

**He shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take care of him until he is completely healed** - The winner of the fight "must compensate his victim for lost wages and provide for his full recovery." In other words he had to reimburse him for his lost wages while recovering and for medical expenses incurred during his recovery.

**Guzik** - These laws of compensation for personal injury have parallels in the Code of Hammurabi and in Hittite Laws.

**Exodus 21:20 "if a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod and he dies at his hand, he shall be punished.**

NET Exodus 21:20 "If a man strikes his male servant or his female servant with a staff so that he or she dies as a result of the blow, he will surely be punished.

NLT Exodus 21:20 "If a man beats his male or female slave with a club and the slave dies as a result, the owner must be punished.

ESV Exodus 21:20 "When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.

LXE Exodus 21:20 And if a man smite his man-servant or his maid-servant, with a rod, and the party die under his hands, he shall be surely punished.

KJV Exodus 21:20 And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.

NIV Exodus 21:20 "If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished,

ASV Exodus 21:20 And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall surely be punished.

CSB Exodus 21:20 "When a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod, and the slave dies under his abuse, the owner must be punished.

NKJ Exodus 21:20 "And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished.

NRS Exodus 21:20 When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished.

YLT Exodus 21:20 'And when a man smiteth his man-servant or his handmaid, with a rod, and he hath died under his hand -- he is certainly avenged;

- **strikes:** Ex 21:26,27 De 19:21 Pr 29:19 Isa 58:3,4
- **he shall:** Ge 9:6 Nu 35:30-33
- **punished:** Heb. avenged, Ge 4:15,24 Nu 35:19 Ro 13:4
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DIVINE JUSTICE FOR STRIKING A SLAVE

**if a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod** - This verse is a bit surprising for it indicates that under the Law, God allowed slaves to be beaten with a rod! God allowed application of discipline but not deadly force!

**And he dies at his hand He shall be punished** - Probably better translated "**avenged**," (ESV) which means to inflict punishment or penalty in return for wrong act, afflicting punishment in retaliation. The idea is to suffer vengeance. As discussed below, the pagan culture granted no rights to slaves and to invoke punishment on the master was unheard of in the ancient world. Pagan slavery did not treat people as human beings, but God's law changed that cruel pattern of thinking and considered the slave as a person created in His image! The point is that Israel was to be a **holy nation** and that holy mandate extended down to the humane, just, and kind treatment of slaves, which would serve to distinguish Israel from the pagan practices for treating (mistreating) slaves.

How he would be punished or avenged is not stated. **Currid** comments that "Obviously the master will be subject to the death penalty, as described in verse 12 above."

**Punished (05359)** (**naqam** from verb form **naqam** = to avenge or take vengeance) is the act of taking revenge (harming someone in retaliation for something harmful that they have done). It refers to punishment inflicted or retribution exacted for an injury or wrong and can refer to punishment beyond what is physical. **Naqam** is translated in the Septuagint in this verse with **ekdikeyo** (**ek** = out or from + **dike** = right, justice; see cognates = **ekdikesis** and **ekdikos**) which literally means that which proceeds from justice. The idea is to vindicate one's right or to do one justice.

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**Question: "[Why does the Bible allow slave owners to beat their slaves?](#)"**

**Answer:** Exodus 21:20–21 says, "Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property." Why did the Mosaic Law allow for slave owners to beat their slaves? The obvious answer is that, in the social structure of ancient Israel, physical punishment was considered the appropriate response for acts of disobedience and rebellion. The text does not specifically say that the corporal punishment has to be for some form of disobedience; however, based on the larger Old Testament context, it is safe to assume that slave masters were not allowed carte blanche authority to do whatever they wanted to their slaves. In Exodus 21, slave owners are limited in what they can do: if the master goes too far and the slave dies, the master will be punished. If the Old Testament Law is followed consistently, then the punishment for the slave owner might even include the death penalty for murder. Of course, if a master beats his slave and the slave is unable to work for some time, the master has punished himself by losing the work he might have received from the slave. The implication here is that it is in the master's best interest not to be too severe.

Exodus 21:20–21 is certainly troubling to people with modern sensitivities. Modern people in the free world have come to view autonomous personal freedom as the highest form of good and anything that curtails personal freedom as the ultimate evil. People may be tempted to read a passage like Exodus 21:20–21 and charge God with moral evil. Such charges need to be challenged, for slavery is not the only area where modern sensitivities and biblical guidelines clash—abortion and homosexuality are two other flashpoints. The danger on this issue is that most Christians would agree that slavery is morally reprehensible.

There are two distinct approaches in formulating an answer to why the Bible allows for slavery, and the outcome will be determined by what a person accepts as the authority. The first approach goes something like this:

- Slavery is morally reprehensible in all situations.
- The Bible allows slavery.
- Therefore the Bible is an unreliable moral guide.

In this case, current moral sensitivities are the authority, and the Bible is measured against those sensitivities.

The second goes something like this:

- The Bible is a reliable moral guide.
- The Bible allows slavery.
- Therefore slavery cannot be morally reprehensible in all situations.

In this case, the Bible is the final authority, and modern thinking about right and wrong has to be adjusted to accommodate what we find in the Bible.

Slavery has been a fact of human existence for almost as long as the human race has been in existence. Physical punishment to enforce compliance has been part of slavery for just as long. Corporal punishment has also been used in situations other than slavery. For example, physical chastisements were commonly employed as punishment for crimes committed and for the enforcing of discipline in the military. We are not so far removed from the time when brutal physical punishment was administered and

accepted by almost everyone as legitimate. In the British Navy, flogging for disobedience or insubordination was common until the mid-19th century, and caning was used until the mid-20th century. In some places, such as Singapore, caning is still an official form of punishment for certain crimes.

The Bible does not forbid slavery, nor does it demand that every slave owner who wants to please God must immediately emancipate his slaves. Instead, the Bible at every turn calls for a treatment of slaves that would have been more humane than any found in the culture at large. The very idea that a master could be punished in any way for killing a slave would have been scandalous at the time Moses gave the Law. The culture at large made no attempt to grant slaves any rights. Slaves in Egypt or Moab, for example, were afforded no such protection.

Earlier in the same chapter, kidnapping for the purpose of slavery is condemned and the death penalty enjoined: "Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession" (Exodus 21:16). (Ironically, the death penalty is another area where modern people assume their moral sensitivity is superior to God's!) **Furthermore, we must not make the mistake of equating slavery in ancient Israel with antebellum slavery in the United States. If the biblical dictates regarding slavery, including the regulations found in Exodus 21:16, 20–21, had been enforced in Western nations in the 1800s, then slavery in the United States would have been very different.** The regulations regarding slaves in Exodus 21, far from being inhumane, would have been far more humane and protective of the slave in Israel than in any of the surrounding nations. ([Gotquestions.org](http://Gotquestions.org))

**Exodus 21:21 "If, however, he survives a day or two, no vengeance shall be taken; for he is his property."**

NET Exodus 21:21 However, if the injured servant survives one or two days, the owner will not be punished, for he has suffered the loss.

NLT Exodus 21:21 But if the slave recovers within a day or two, then the owner shall not be punished, since the slave is his property.

ESV Exodus 21:21 But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

LXE Exodus 21:21 But if the servant continue to live a day or two, let not the master be punished; for he is his money.

KJV Exodus 21:21 Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.

NIV Exodus 21:21 but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property.

ASV Exodus 21:21 Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.

CSB Exodus 21:21 However, if the slave can stand up after a day or two, the owner should not be punished because he is his owner's property.

NKJ Exodus 21:21 "Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property.

NRS Exodus 21:21 But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property.

YLT Exodus 21:21 only if he remain a day, or two days, he is not avenged, for he is his money.

- Lev 25:45,46
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

This verse is difficult to interpret dogmatically.

**If, however, he survives a day or two, no vengeance shall be taken-** The implication (comparing preceding passage Ex 21:20) is that God was not specifically prohibiting a master from striking his slave (see [note above](#)). The NET renders it "However, if the injured servant survives one or two days, the owner will not be punished, for he has suffered the loss."

**Guzik** has an interesting comment - The idea was that if the victim did not die immediately, it was evidence that he was struck with the intention of discipline and not murder. Additionally, if the slave died through this unintentional attack, the loss of property was thought to be penalty enough to the master.



**Currid** on the other hand comments that "If the slave survives for a day or more, then the master will not be put to death—the intention of the master clearly was not to kill the slave. This does not mean the lord goes unpunished (see commentary on 21:26–27). It simply means he will not be sentenced to capital punishment." (Ibid)

**For he is his property - He** refers to the slave's master or owner. NLT - "for he has suffered the loss." The point would be that the master/owner receives as his punishment, the loss of the productivity by the slave!

**NET Note** - It seems that if the slave survives a couple of days, it is probable that the master was punishing him and not intending to kill him. If he then dies, there is no penalty other than that the owner loses the slave who is his property—he suffers the loss.

**Exodus 21:22 "If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide."**

NET Exodus 21:22 "If men fight and hit a pregnant woman and her child is born prematurely, but there is no serious injury, he will surely be punished in accordance with what the woman's husband demands of him, and he will pay what the court decides.

NLT Exodus 21:22 "Now suppose two men are fighting, and in the process they accidentally strike a pregnant woman so she gives birth prematurely. If no further injury results, the man who struck the woman must pay the amount of compensation the woman's husband demands and the judges approve.

ESV Exodus 21:22 "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.

LXE Exodus 21:22 And if two men strive and smite a woman with child, and her child be born imperfectly formed, he shall be forced to pay a penalty: as the woman's husband may lay upon him, he shall pay with a valuation.

KJV Exodus 21:22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

NIV Exodus 21:22 "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows.

ASV Exodus 21:22 And if men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follow; he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

CSB Exodus 21:22 "When men get in a fight and hit a pregnant woman so that her children are born prematurely but there is no injury, the one who hit her must be fined as the woman's husband demands from him, and he must pay according to judicial assessment.

NKJ Exodus 21:22 "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

NRS Exodus 21:22 When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine.

YLT Exodus 21:22 'And when men strive, and have smitten a pregnant woman, and her children have come out, and there is no mischief, he is certainly fined, as the husband of the woman doth lay upon him, and he hath given through the judges;

- **If men struggle with each other:** Ex 21:18
- **he shall pay as the judges decide:** Ex 21:30 De 16:18 22:18,19
- [Meredith G Kline Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus - JETS 20, 1977](#)
- [Wayne House - Exodus 21:22-25: Miscarriage or premature birth: WTJ 41 \(1978\): 108–23](#)
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



## **BRAWL RESULTING IN INJURY TO A PREGNANT WOMAN**

**If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage-** Literally **that she has a miscarriage** (NRS, NAB, NJB) reads "her children have come out" phrasing used by the ESV. Several versions (NET, NLT, NIV, NKJ, GWN) interpret this not as a miscarriage (which would be death of the infant) but as premature birth (which would not necessarily result in death of the newborn).

**Yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him And he shall pay as the judges decide** - The amount of the fine would be determined by the judges. NLT - "must pay the amount of compensation the woman's husband demands and the judges approve."

**Exodus 21:23 "But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life,**

NET Exodus 21:23 But if there is serious injury, then you will give a life for a life,

NLT Exodus 21:23 But if there is further injury, the punishment must match the injury: a life for a life,

ESV Exodus 21:23 But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life,

LXE Exodus 21:23 But if it be perfectly formed, he shall give life for life,

KJV Exodus 21:23 And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

NIV Exodus 21:23 But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,

ASV Exodus 21:23 But if any harm follow, then thou shalt give life for life,

CSB Exodus 21:23 If there is an injury, then you must give life for life,

NKJ Exodus 21:23 "But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

NRS Exodus 21:23 If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life,

YLT Exodus 21:23 and if there is mischief, then thou hast given life for life,

- **life for life:** Nu 35:31
- [Meredith G Kline Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus - JETS 20, 1977](#)
- [Wayne House - Exodus 21:22-25: Miscarriage or premature birth: WTJ 41 \(1978\): 108-23](#)
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life-** This says that if the punishment must match the injury. It was meant to curtail to man's natural desire for vengeance. So if there is loss of life, the payment required is lost of life of the guilty party. In other words if there was serious injury then "lex talionis" rule below would apply - "The punishment should fit the crime."

**Guzik** - Our tendency is to want to do more against the offending party than what they did to us. This principle can apply to our modern practice of assessing huge punitive damages in lawsuits, and this law presents the principle that only the loss itself is to be compensated.

**Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,**

NET Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

NLT Exodus 21:24 an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot,

ESV Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

LXE Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

KJV Exodus 21:24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

NIV Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
ASV Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
CSB Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
NKJ Exodus 21:24 "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
NRS Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
YLT Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
NAB Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
NJB Exodus 21:24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
GWN Exodus 21:24 an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot,

- Ex 21:26,27 Lev 24:19,20 De 19:21 Jud 1:6,7 1Sa 15:33 Mt 5:38-40 7:2 Lu 6:38 Rev 16:6
- [Meredith G Kline Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus - JETS 20, 1977](#)
- [Wayne House - Exodus 21:22-25: Miscarriage or premature birth: WTJ 41 \(1978\): 108-23](#)
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LEX TALIONIS "LAW OF RETALIATION"

This passage is a continuation of Ex 21:23 dealing with harm that comes to a mother or child. If there is harm the "law of retribution" comes into effect. In short, the punishment must "fit the crime." In other words, the crime is used as the "pattern" for the punishment. We have already seen this same principle with capital punishment in Ex 21:12 (cf Lev 24:17).

**Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot** - The principle of "eye for eye", etc, is that the punishment meted out must match the crime or injury and neither be too severe or too lenient. This is the earliest account we have of the Lex Talionis, law of like for like. Leviticus 24:20 is similar and adds "just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him." A parallel account in Deuteronomy 19:21 adds "Thus you shall not show pity" indicating you should dispense the just punishment and not withhold punishment because you feel bad for their circumstances.

**Wiersbe** on Lex Talionis - The Latin word **talis** means "such like" and gives us the English word "retaliate," which means "to pay back in kind." The **lex talionis** (law of retaliation) was a principle that kept people from taking revenge and requiring more punishment than the crime demanded, as it were, killing a mosquito with a cannon. This principle has been severely criticized by some as being "barbaric," but it's just the opposite. In an age when the legal system was developing, this law made sure that the punishment meted out by the judges was equal to the seriousness and severity of the crime, not more and not less. If the guilty aggressor blinded his enemy's eye, then his own eye was blinded. Nothing could be fairer. If you broke your enemy's finger and the court ordered you to be blinded, that wouldn't be fair at all, because the sentence must fit the crime. The only time this principle was not enforced was when a master injured a slave, and the slave's compensation was his or her freedom (Ex 21:26-27). (Be Delivered)

**Currid** relates this law to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes the following statement: 'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you' (Matt. 5:38-42). The question is, did Jesus abrogate the application of the lex talionis, measure for measure, principle? Is it not to apply to societies since the coming of Christ? Did Jesus repeal this principle, thus leaving the question of judicial punishment wide open, and up to each society to decide? For example, does Jesus' teaching forbid capital punishment as a penalty for murder—that is, a life for a life? It is likely that Jesus was not repealing the law of equivalence, but rather was repudiating the Pharisaic misinterpretation and misapplication of lex talionis. Many of the Hebrew leaders of the age were insisting upon the application of that principle so strictly that there was no room for compassion or mercy. Often, no matter what the circumstances or conditions, the Jewish leaders pronounced the most severe and harshest of judgements. In addition, the leaders not only applied lex talionis in judicial settings, but also in personal relationships. The principle had become very legalistic. Jesus was condemning their passion and zeal for punishment (Ibid)

### Related Resource:

- [What is the law of retribution?](#)

**Question - [What does the Bible mean by "an eye for an eye"?](#)**

**Answer:** The concept of “an eye for eye,” sometimes called *jus talionis* or *lex talionis*, is part of the Mosaic Law used in the Israelites’ justice system. The principle is that the punishment must fit the crime and there should be a just penalty for evil actions: “If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Exodus 21:23–25). Justice should be equitable; excessive harshness and excessive leniency should be avoided.

**We have no indication that the law of “an eye for an eye” was followed literally; there is never a biblical account of an Israelite being maimed as a result of this law.** Also, before this particular law was given, God had already established a judicial system to hear cases and determine penalties (Exodus 18:13–26)—a system that would be unnecessary if God had intended a literal “eye for an eye” penalty. Although capital crimes were repaid with execution in ancient Israel, on the basis of multiple witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6), most other crimes were repaid with payment in goods—if you injured a man’s hand so that he could not work, you compensated that man for his lost wages.

Besides Exodus 21, the law of “an eye for an eye” is mentioned twice in the Old Testament (Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Each time, the phrase is used in the context of a case being judged before a civil authority such as a judge. “An eye for an eye” was thus intended to be a guiding principle for lawgivers and judges; it was never to be used to justify vigilantism or settling grievances personally.

In the New Testament, it seems the Pharisees and scribes had taken the “eye for an eye” principle and applied it to everyday personal relationships. They taught that seeking personal revenge was acceptable. If someone punched you, you could punch him back; if someone insulted you, he was fair game for your insults. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day ignored the judicial basis of the giving of that law.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus counters the common teaching of personal retaliation: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you . . .” (Matthew 5:38–39). Jesus then proceeds to reveal God’s heart concerning interpersonal relationships: “Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:39–42).

In giving this “new” command, Jesus is not nullifying the Old Testament law (Matthew 5:17). Rather, He is separating the responsibility of the government (to punish evildoers justly) from the responsibility we all have on a personal level before God to love our enemies. We should not seek retribution for personal slights. We are to ignore personal insults (the meaning of “turn the other cheek”). Christians are to be willing to give more of their material goods, time, and labor than required, even if the demands upon us are unjust. We should loan to those who want to borrow, love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute us (verses 43–48). Enforcing “an eye for an eye” is the magistrate’s job; forgiving our enemies is ours. We see this played out today every time a victim stands up in court to publicly forgive a convicted criminal—the forgiveness is personal and real, but the judge still justly demands that the sentence be carried out.

Jesus’ limiting of the “eye for an eye” principle in no way prohibits self-defense or the forceful protection of the innocent from harm. The actions of duly appointed agents of the government, such as police officers and the military, to protect citizens and preserve the peace are not in question. Jesus’ command to turn the other cheek applies to personal relationships, not judicial policy. The principle of “an eye for an eye” is meant as a judicial policy, not as a rule for interpersonal relationships. The believer in Christ is guided by Jesus’ words to forgive. The Christian is radically different from those who follow the natural inclination to respond in kind. (Source: [GotQuestions.org](#))

**Exodus 21:25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.**

NET Exodus 21:25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

NLT Exodus 21:25 a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise.

ESV Exodus 21:25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

LXE Exodus 21:25 burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

KJV Exodus 21:25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

NIV Exodus 21:25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

ASV Exodus 21:25 burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

CSB Exodus 21:25 burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

NKJ Exodus 21:25 "burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

NRS Exodus 21:25 burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

YLT Exodus 21:25 burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

- [Meredith G Kline Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus - JETS 20, 1977](#)
- [Wayne House - Exodus 21:22-25: Miscarriage or premature birth: WTJ 41 \(1978\): 108-23](#)
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LEX TALIONIS FOR BURNS, WOUNDS AND BRUISES

**Burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise** - The Hebrew word for **bruise** (chabburah) is also used in Isaiah 53:5+ "by His scouring (chabburah) we are healed."

**Exodus 21:26 "If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye.**

NET Exodus 21:26 "If a man strikes the eye of his male servant or his female servant so that he destroys it, he will let the servant go free as compensation for the eye.

NLT Exodus 21:26 "If a man hits his male or female slave in the eye and the eye is blinded, he must let the slave go free to compensate for the eye.

ESV Exodus 21:26 "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.

LXE Exodus 21:26 And if one smite the eye of his man-servant, or the eye of his maid-servant, and put it out, he shall let them go free for their eye's sake.

KJV Exodus 21:26 And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

NIV Exodus 21:26 "If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye.

ASV Exodus 21:26 And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, and destroy it; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

CSB Exodus 21:26 "When a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave and destroys it, he must let the slave go free in compensation for his eye.

NKJ Exodus 21:26 "If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye.

NRS Exodus 21:26 When a slaveowner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye.

YLT Exodus 21:26 'And when a man smiteth the eye of his man-servant, or the eye of his handmaid, and hath destroyed it, as a freeman he doth send him away for his eye;

- Ex 21:20 De 16:19 Ne 5:5 Job 31:13-15 Ps 9:12 10:14,18 72:12-14 Pr 22:22,23 Eph 6:9 Col 4:1
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

We now encounter two exceptions to lex talionis, for here the punishment is not an eye for an eye, but is to freedom for the slave

whose eye is damaged, and in the next verse whose tooth is damaged.

**If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it-** NLT - "If a man hits his male or female slave in the eye and the eye is blinded." **Destroys** ([shachath](#)) is a strong verb used of God's action on Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 13:10, Ge 18:28, 31-32) and so means to ruin or completely destroy.

**Destroys** (07843)([shachath](#)) means to decay, to go to ruin, to corrupt, to destroy, to lay waste (Egypt from swarms of flies - Ex 8:24). God warned He would **destroy** Israel if they were turned away from following Him (Nu 32:15).

**He shall let him go free on account of his eye-** "he must let the slave go free to compensate for the eye." The verb **let...go** is [shalach](#) which is used repeatedly in Exodus for letting the people of Israel go, releasing them from slavery (Ex 5:1; Ex 5:2; Ex 6:1; Ex 6:11; Ex 7:2; Ex 7:14; Ex 7:16, etc). Now God says the master will have to release the slave who he injured!

**Currid** - The master is guilty of aggravated assault, and the Bible in no way sanctions mistreatment of slaves. The Torah takes great pity upon those in bondage. Laws like this for the protection of slaves are unique to the Bible in the entire ancient Near East.

**Guzik** points out that "the laws guide the behavior of the master, giving him incentive to protect and honor his slave, treating them more like an employee than a work-animal.

**Exodus 21:27 "And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth."**

NET Exodus 21:27 If he knocks out the tooth of his male servant or his female servant, he will let the servant go free as compensation for the tooth.

NLT Exodus 21:27 And if a man knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave, he must let the slave go free to compensate for the tooth.

ESV Exodus 21:27 If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

LXE Exodus 21:27 And if he should smite out the tooth of his man-servant, or the tooth of his maid-servant, he shall send them away free for their tooth's sake.

KJV Exodus 21:27 And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

NIV Exodus 21:27 And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.

ASV Exodus 21:27 And if he smite out his man-servant's tooth, or his maid-servant's tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

CSB Exodus 21:27 If he knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave, he must let the slave go free in compensation for his tooth.

NKJ Exodus 21:27 "And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth.

NRS Exodus 21:27 If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.

YLT Exodus 21:27 and if a tooth of his man-servant or a tooth of his handmaid he knock out, as a freeman he doth send him away for his tooth.

- smite: Ex 21:19
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## AN COSTLY "DENTAL BILL"

**And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth-** Again the verb **let...go** is [shalach](#). God says the master will lose permanently the productivity of the slave he mistreated and knocked a tooth out of

his mouth.

**Adam Clarke** makes a good point - If this did not teach them humanity, it taught them caution, as one rash blow (KNOCKING A TOOTH OUT) might have deprived them of all right to the future services of the slave; and this self-interest obliged them to be cautious and circumspect.

**Exodus 21:28 "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished."**

NET Exodus 21:28 "If an ox gores a man or a woman so that either dies, then the ox must surely be stoned and its flesh must not be eaten, but the owner of the ox will be acquitted.

NLT Exodus 21:28 "If an ox gores a man or woman to death, the ox must be stoned, and its flesh may not be eaten. In such a case, however, the owner will not be held liable.

ESV Exodus 21:28 "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.

LXE Exodus 21:28 And if a bull gore a man or woman and they die, the bull shall be stoned with stones, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the bull shall be clear.

KJV Exodus 21:28 If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit.

NIV Exodus 21:28 "If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible.

ASV Exodus 21:28 And if an ox gore a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be surely stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit.

CSB Exodus 21:28 "When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox must be stoned, and its meat may not be eaten, but the ox's owner is innocent.

NKJ Exodus 21:28 "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted.

NRS Exodus 21:28 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.

YLT Exodus 21:28 'And when an ox doth gore man or woman, and they have died, the ox is certainly stoned, and his flesh is not eaten, and the owner of the ox is acquitted;

- the ox: Ex 21:32 Ge 9:5,6 Lev 20:15,16
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## LEX TALIONIS FOR BEASTS

**If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished** - What is the point? If the animal had no previous history of harming and then accidentally caused harm, the owner would not be held culpable. What the ox has done is considered so detestable that even any meat that might have been eaten is not considered fit to be eaten. The owner is not otherwise liable for he was not negligent. .

The punishment of the beast reflects a similar statement in Genesis 9:5-6

Surely I will require your lifeblood; **from every beast I will require it.** And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever (IN THIS CASE EVEN IF HE IS A BEAST) sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

**Exodus 21:29 "If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goading and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death."**

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Currid 'But if an ox habitually gores, and protests have been made against its owner and he does not confine it, but it kills a man or a woman—the ox shall be stoned to death, and also its owner shall be put to death.'

NET Exodus 21:29 But if the ox had the habit of goring, and its owner was warned, and he did not take the necessary precautions, and then it killed a man or a woman, the ox must be stoned and the man must be put to death.

NLT Exodus 21:29 But suppose the ox had a reputation for goring, and the owner had been informed but failed to keep it under control. If the ox then kills someone, it must be stoned, and the owner must also be put to death.

ESV Exodus 21:29 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.

LXE Exodus 21:29 But if the bull should have been given to goring in former time, and men should have told his owner, and he have not removed him, but he should have slain a man or woman, the bull shall be stoned, and his owner shall die also.

KJV Exodus 21:29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death.

NIV Exodus 21:29 If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death.

ASV Exodus 21:29 But if the ox was wont to gore in time past, and it hath been testified to its owner, and he hath not kept it in, but it hath killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death.

CSB Exodus 21:29 However, if the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned yet does not restrain it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox must be stoned, and its owner must also be put to death.

NKJ Exodus 21:29 "But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.

NRS Exodus 21:29 If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death.

YLT Exodus 21:29 and if the ox is one accustomed to gore heretofore, and it hath been testified to its owner, and he doth not watch it, and it hath put to death a man or woman, the ox is stoned, and its owner also is put to death.

- **owner also:** De 21:1-9
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR WILLFUL NEGLIGENCE**

**If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring-** This scenario contrast with the previous passage because the former was a random accident, but the present description is of habitually dangerous behavior.

**And its owner has been warned** - More literally "has been testified against."

**Yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death**  
Clearly the owner knew the animal was dangerous and yet did nothing to prevent the ox (properly penning or tying him up) from harming others . The law did not differentiate between sexes. In this scenario the owner is held guilty of killing someone made in the image of God (Ge 9:6, Ex 21:12).



**Exodus 21:30 "If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him.**

NET Exodus 21:30 If a ransom is set for him, then he must pay the redemption for his life according to whatever amount was set for him.

NLT Exodus 21:30 However, the dead person's relatives may accept payment to compensate for the loss of life. The owner of the ox may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.

ESV Exodus 21:30 If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him.

LXE Exodus 21:30 And if a ransom should be imposed on him, he shall pay for the ransom of his soul as much as they shall lay upon him.

KJV Exodus 21:30 If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.

NIV Exodus 21:30 However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.

ASV Exodus 21:30 If there be laid on him a ransom, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.

CSB Exodus 21:30 If instead a ransom is demanded of him, he can pay a redemption price for his life in the full amount demanded from him.

NKJ Exodus 21:30 "If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him.

NRS Exodus 21:30 If a ransom is imposed on the owner, then the owner shall pay whatever is imposed for the redemption of the victim's life.

YLT Exodus 21:30 'If atonement is laid upon him, then he hath given the ransom of his life, according to all that is laid upon him;

- for the ransom: Ex 21:22 30:12 Nu 35:31-33 Pr 13:8
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **RANSOM ALLOWED IF FAMILY AMENABLE**

**If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him-** NLT = "However, the dead person's relatives may accept payment to compensate for the loss of life. The owner of the ox may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded." The deceased person's family had the option of receiving a ransom payment from the owner of the ox that killed their relative. If the otherwise condemned man paid the ransom price, he would be set free from the penalty of capital punishment.

**Currid** explains that "According to Numbers 35:31, 'You shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall certainly be put to death.' Apparently, then, although the owner of the ox in verse 29 is held culpable for what the animal did, he is not, strictly speaking, considered a murderer. Rather, his punishment may be tempered by a ransom, or fine, being levied on him."

**NET Note** - This practice was common in the ancient world, rare in Israel.

**Exodus 21:31 "Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule.**

NET Exodus 21:31 If the ox gores a son or a daughter, the owner will be dealt with according to this rule.

NLT Exodus 21:31 "The same regulation applies if the ox gores a boy or a girl.

ESV Exodus 21:31 If it gores a man's son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule.

LXE Exodus 21:31 And if the bull gore a son or daughter, let them do to him according to this ordinance.

KJV Exodus 21:31 Whether he have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgment shall it be done unto him.

NIV Exodus 21:31 This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter.

ASV Exodus 21:31 Whether it have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgment shall it be done unto him.

CSB Exodus 21:31 If it gores a son or a daughter, he is to be dealt with according to this same law.

NKJ Exodus 21:31 "Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.

NRS Exodus 21:31 If it gores a boy or a girl, the owner shall be dealt with according to this same rule.

YLT Exodus 21:31 whether it gore a son or gore a daughter, according to this judgment it is done to him.

- **according to the same rule**, Ex 21:31
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule-** NET = " If the ox gores a son or a daughter, the owner will be dealt with according to this rule."

**Currid** has an interesting comment - "A common principle in ancient Near-Eastern law is vicarious punishment. For instance, if someone kills another person's son, then the offender's son is to be killed. This tenet may be seen in Laws nos. 116, 209–10 and 229–30 in the Code of Hammurabi. That is not the case in biblical law; here the man who is the owner of the ox is responsible and his life is forfeit. The equality of men and women under the law in the Hebrew Bible is quite striking. In many law codes of the ancient Near East, women are not even considered or dealt with in great detail. They are treated as second-class citizens. (Ibid)

**Guzik** - The same principles were applied in the death of a minor. They were regarded as people with rights to respect as well as adults.

**Exodus 21:32 "If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.**

NET Exodus 21:32 If the ox gores a male servant or a female servant, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver, and the ox must be stoned.

NLT Exodus 21:32 But if the ox gores a slave, either male or female, the animal's owner must pay the slave's owner thirty silver coins, and the ox must be stoned.

ESV Exodus 21:32 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.

LXE Exodus 21:32 And if the bull gore a man-servant or maid-servant, he shall pay to their master thirty silver didrachms, and the bull shall be stoned.

KJV Exodus 21:32 If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

NIV Exodus 21:32 If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.

ASV Exodus 21:32 If the ox gore a man-servant or a maid-servant, there shall be given unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

CSB Exodus 21:32 If the ox gores a male or female slave, he must give 30 shekels of silver to the slave's master, and the ox must be stoned.

NKJ Exodus 21:32 "If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

NRS Exodus 21:32 If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall pay to the slaveowner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

YLT Exodus 21:32 'If the ox gore a man-servant or a handmaid, thirty silver shekels he doth give to their lord, and the ox is stoned.

- **Shekels of silver** - Ge 37:28 Zec 11:12,13 Mt 26:15 Mt 27:3-9 Php 2:7
- and the ox: Ex 21:28,29
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**If the ox gores a male or female slave** - It does not state whether the slave was just wounded or actually died. However, the fact that the ox was to be put to death would suggest the ox had caused someone's death as in Ex 21:28.

**The owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver** - The payment would be made to the owner of the slave. For reference note that in Ge 37:28 Joseph's brother's "sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver." Almost 1400 years later Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for 30 shekels of silver (Mt 26:15, cf Mt 27:3-9).

**And the ox shall be stoned** - As in Exodus 21:28.

### Exodus 21:33 "If a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

NET Exodus 21:33 "If a man opens a pit or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

NLT Exodus 21:33 "Suppose someone digs or uncovers a pit and fails to cover it, and then an ox or a donkey falls into it.

ESV Exodus 21:33 "When a man opens a pit, or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

LXE Exodus 21:33 And if any one open a pit or dig a cavity in stone, and cover it not, and an ox or an ass fall in there,

KJV Exodus 21:33 And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein;

NIV Exodus 21:33 "If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

ASV Exodus 21:33 And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein,

CSB Exodus 21:33 "When a man uncovers a pit or digs a pit, and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

NKJ Exodus 21:33 "And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it,

NRS Exodus 21:33 If someone leaves a pit open, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

YLT Exodus 21:33 'And when a man doth open a pit, or when a man doth dig a pit, and doth not cover it, and an ox or ass hath fallen thither, --

- Ps 9:15 119:85 Pr 28:10 Ec 10:8 Jer 18:20,22
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Guzik** - These laws communicate the principle of responsibility for the consequences of an individual's actions upon another.

**If a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it** NLT = "Suppose someone digs or uncovers a pit and fails to cover it, and then an ox or a donkey falls into it."

**Currid** - The equality of men and women under the law in the Hebrew Bible is quite striking. In many law codes of the ancient Near

East, women are not even considered or dealt with in great detail. They are treated as second-class citizens. (Ibid)

**Cole** on pit - More likely for grain storage than water storage. Pits were also used as traps for animals (2 Samuel 23:20) or prisons for men (Genesis 37:24).

**Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall give money to its owner, and the dead animal shall become his.**

NET Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit must repay the loss. He must give money to its owner, and the dead animal will become his.

NLT Exodus 21:34 The owner of the pit must pay full compensation to the owner of the animal, but then he gets to keep the dead animal.

ESV Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner, and the dead beast shall be his.

LXE Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit shall make compensation; he shall give money to their owner, and the dead shall be his own.

KJV Exodus 21:34 The owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his.

NIV Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his.

ASV Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money unto the owner thereof, and the dead beast shall be his.

CSB Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit must give compensation; he must pay money to its owner, but the dead animal will become his.

NKJ Exodus 21:34 "the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead animal shall be his.

NRS Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit shall make restitution, giving money to its owner, but keeping the dead animal.

YLT Exodus 21:34 the owner of the pit doth repay, money he doth give back to its owner, and the dead is his.

- Ex 21:29,30 22:6,14
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**The owner of the pit shall make restitution - He shall** is better rendered "he must," for this was an obligatory and not an optional payment. **Make restitution** ([shalam](#)) means to make payment in full, fully recompensing the owner of the dead animal for his loss. The Septuagint uses the verb **apotino** (in NT only in Philemon 1:19, also in Lxx of Ex 21:36 and Ex 21:37) which was a legal technical term for damages to be paid off to the other party.

**He shall give money** (literally "silver") **to its owner, and the dead animal shall become his** - The owner had to make restitution and put the dead animal to rest.

**Exodus 21:35 "If one man's ox hurts another's so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price equally; and also they shall divide the dead ox.**

NET Exodus 21:35 If the ox of one man injures the ox of his neighbor so that it dies, then they will sell the live ox and divide its proceeds, and they will also divide the dead ox.

NLT Exodus 21:35 "If someone's ox injures a neighbor's ox and the injured ox dies, then the two owners must sell the live ox and divide the price equally between them. They must also divide the dead animal.

ESV Exodus 21:35 "When one man's ox butts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and

share its price, and the dead beast also they shall share.

LXE Exodus 21:35 And if any man's bull gore the bull of his neighbour, and it die, they shall sell the living bull and divide the money, and they shall divide the dead bull.

KJV Exodus 21:35 And if one man's ox hurt another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead ox also they shall divide.

NIV Exodus 21:35 "If a man's bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally.

ASV Exodus 21:35 And if one man's ox hurt another's, so that it dieth, then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the price of it: and the dead also they shall divide.

CSB Exodus 21:35 "When a man's ox injures his neighbor's ox and it dies, they must sell the live ox and divide its proceeds; they must also divide the dead animal.

NKJ Exodus 21:35 "If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide.

NRS Exodus 21:35 If someone's ox hurts the ox of another, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the price of it; and the dead animal they shall also divide.

YLT Exodus 21:35 'And when a man's ox doth smite the ox of his neighbour, and it hath died, then they have sold the living ox, and halved its money, and also the dead one they do halve;

- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**If one man's ox hurts another's so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price equally; and also they shall divide the dead ox** - The attacking ox had no prior history of such behavior (in contrast to the situation in Ex 21:36). Nevertheless the owner was still required to sell the living ox, so that the two owners shared in the loss.

**Exodus 21:36 "Or if it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall become his.**

NET Exodus 21:36 Or if it is known that the ox had the habit of goring, and its owner did not take the necessary precautions, he must surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal will become his.

NLT Exodus 21:36 But if the ox had a reputation for goring, yet its owner failed to keep it under control, he must pay full compensation-- a live ox for the dead one-- but he may keep the dead ox.

ESV Exodus 21:36 Or if it is known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not kept it in, he shall repay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his.

LXE Exodus 21:36 But if the bull be known to have been given to goring in time past, and they have testified to his owner, and he have not removed him, he shall repay bull for bull, but the dead shall be his own.

KJV Exodus 21:36 Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own.

NIV Exodus 21:36 However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and the dead animal will be his.

ASV Exodus 21:36 Or if it be known that the ox was wont to gore in time past, and its owner hath not kept it in, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his own.

CSB Exodus 21:36 If, however, it is known that the ox was in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not restrained it, he must compensate fully, ox for ox; the dead animal will become his.

NKJ Exodus 21:36 "Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.

NRS Exodus 21:36 But if it was known that the ox was accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not restrained it, the owner shall restore ox for ox, but keep the dead animal.

YLT Exodus 21:36 or, it hath been known that the ox is one accustomed to gore heretofore, and its owner doth not watch it, he certainly repayeth ox for ox, and the dead is his.

- Ex 21:29
- Exodus 21 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Or if it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall become his** - Pay ox for ox means he must make full restitution for his negligence in not taking measures to prevent his ox from harming someone else's ox.

**Matthew Henry** says, "It is not enough for us not to do mischief ourselves, but we must take care that no mischief be done by those whom it is in our power to restrain, whether man or beast.'

**NET Note** - The point of this section (21:28–36) seems to be that one must ensure the safety of others by controlling one's property and possessions. This section pertained to neglect with animals, but the message would have applied to similar situations. The people of God were to take heed to ensure the well-being of others, and if there was a problem, it had to be made right.

**Currid** points out that "In English common law, if a person owns an animal with a history of violence, and that animal causes hurt, then it is considered a felony. The owner is guilty of criminal negligence and intent."