

Further Laws for the Protection and Regulation of Israelite Society

Exodus 22

Exodus 22 - *"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. ² If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. ³ If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. ⁴ If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.*

⁵ "If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. ⁶ "If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

⁷ "If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. ⁸ If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods.

⁹ "For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. ¹⁰ If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, ¹¹ then an oath of the Lord shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good. ¹² But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. ¹³ If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn.

¹⁴ "And if a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not being with it, he shall surely make it good. ¹⁵ If its owner was with it, he shall not make it good; if it was hired, it came for its hire.

¹⁶ "If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. ¹⁷ If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.

¹⁸ "You shall not permit a sorceress to live. ¹⁹ "Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death. ²⁰ "He who sacrifices to any god, except to the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed. ²¹ "You shall neither mistreat a ^[b]stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²² "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; ²⁴ and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

²⁵ "If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. ²⁶ If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. ²⁷ For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious. ²⁸ "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. ²⁹ "You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. ³⁰ Likewise you

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

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

Background notes

The Mosaic Law consisted of much more than just the Ten Commandments. It consisted of all the laws in the Pentateuch from Exodus 20 right on through Deuteronomy. All the laws under the Mosaic Covenant could be divided into three different categories: moral laws, civil laws, and ceremonial laws.

The Ten Commandments were primarily **moral** laws. The only non-moral commandment of the “Big Ten” was the law about keeping the Sabbath. Even in the Sabbath law, though, there is the moral principle of taking time out from work to rest and remember the Lord.

The laws of the Mosaic Covenant relating to the offerings and feasts were obviously **ceremonial** laws. Most of Leviticus consists of ceremonial laws, for example. Exodus 22 is primarily concerned with **civil** laws. Certainly, there would be some overlap in the three categories of moral, civil and ceremonial laws, but it is helpful, when studying the Mosaic Covenant and making any application for today, to keep these three different categories in mind.

Here in Exodus 22 we have further civil laws under the Mosaic Covenant.

Doctrinal Point

The Mosaic Law was given for the protection and regulation of society.

There are five parts to this doctrinal point.

1. Under the law, full restitution was required.

In these verses, full restitution is the main theme. If something was stolen, destroyed, broken or lost, the guilty party was to make full restitution—and sometimes more! In the case of theft, five oxen were to be returned for one ox stolen, and four sheep for one sheep (v1). If the stolen animal was found alive and well, then the thief only had to pay double (v4).

If a thief was killed at night (v2), it was considered self-defense because the owner was not aware of the intruder’s motive. But if the thief was killed during the day (v3), it was not considered justifiable homicide, and the owner might have to flee to the nearest city of refuge from the revenge of the thief’s nearest relative. The thief’s relatives, of course, would have to make full restitution for anything he had stolen, regardless of whether the thief was killed rightly or wrongly. If a thief could not make restitution, he had to sell himself into slavery until the debt was paid (v.3).

If you owned an animal that destroyed a neighbor’s property, or if you started a fire that got out of hand and damaged another person’s property, you had to make restitution with the **best** of your field or vineyard, not just the leftovers (v5-6)!

Verses 7-13 cover possible dishonesty in claiming that a loss had taken place. After all, someone might say something was lost or stolen or destroyed, but they could be lying. In these cases, convincing evidence of the theft or loss had to be shown, or if not, the judges would decide the matter after both parties took oaths of honesty before the Lord.

If something you borrowed got ruined, injured or lost when it was under your care, you had to make full restitution. Certainly this biblical principle applies today. Question: What should you do if you borrow something, and it breaks, or gets lost or damaged in some way? Answer: You should make full restitution.

Here's an illustration: One summer when I was a speaker at a teen camp, I borrowed a counselor's windsurfer, and while I was sailing, I broke the mast by mistake. At that time a new mast for a sailboard cost about \$125. Even though he said it was OK, and told me not to worry about it, I felt I had an obligation to make full restitution. And I knew the whole camp was observing the situation! So, I went to the bank and got \$125 in five-dollar bills and paid him the \$125, bill by bill, in the front of the camp in the dining room at lunch the next day! It was a good lesson for everyone -- including me!

I'd be careful about borrowing other people's stuff! Cars, for example. Don't use the excuse that the owner's insurance will cover any loss. Who pays the increased rates if an accident takes place? Remember, full restitution is a biblical principle.

2. Under the law, a dowry was required (v16-17).

This situation in these verses is not rape. In the case of rape, the offender was put to death, according to Deuteronomy 22. Verses 16-17 give the regulations in the situation of consensual sex between an unmarried young man and woman. In this case, the man had to pay the required dowry, or bride price, and marry the woman. Under the Law, he could never divorce her, according to Deuteronomy 22.

The only exception would be if the girl's father absolutely forbade the marriage. In that case, the young man still had to pay the dowry as his penalty. In that culture, when that woman did get married, her father would not be able to request as high a dowry (bride price) if his daughter was no longer a virgin.

3. Under the law, the death penalty was required (v18-20).

We saw in chapter 21 that certain crimes besides murder were considered capital offenses. Here we see that witchcraft, bestiality, and sacrificing to idols were also punishable by death.

4. Under the law, kindness was required (v21-27).

In the Mosaic Law, and the rest of the Bible, we see that God is concerned about the poor and needy—the stranger, the widow, the orphan and others. To take advantage of these folks, then and today, is serious sin. Taking advantage of people who are poor or needy or powerless makes God very angry, and He will judge the guilty.

Under the law you were not to charge poor people interest, and if you took any of their meager belongings as security, such as a coat that was used as a blanket, you were to return it every night.

God is still concerned about the poor and needy. Don't take advantage of them, or you will be going against God, and you will not prosper!

5. Under the law, giving to the Lord was required (v28-31).

Under the law you were **required** to bring your offerings and sacrifices. You were **required** to give of your first fruits. You were **required** to bring your tithes.

You were **required** to give your firstborn to the Lord. In the case of animals, the firstborn was sacrificed. In the case of children, the firstborn was redeemed with a certain amount of money, according to Numbers 3. Also, in Numbers 3 we see that the Levites became a substitute for the firstborn in a family, and the Levites were supported by the required tithes.

We're no longer under the Mosaic Law, so our giving to the Lord is not required as it was in the Old Testament. But certainly we have a biblical principle here: as Christians, we are obligated to give to the Lord. We should determine to give of our substance to the Lord. And, in view of all the Lord has done for us, we should **at least** be giving as much to the Lord as what was required under the Law!

In the closing verses of the chapter, we see a couple of additional laws for the protection and regulation of Israelite society. The people were not to curse God or a ruler in their society, because the ruler was in the line of God's authority (v28). They were not to eat "road kill" — that is, animals killed by other animals in the field (v31). This was for health reasons, as well as the fact that the blood had not been properly drained, as God commanded in the Noahic Covenant of Genesis 9.

So, again, we see that the Mosaic Law was given for the protection and regulation of society.

Practical Application

Don't delay your giving!

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

The children of Israel were not to delay their giving to the Lord. They were not to say, "Well, I can't give now - I'll make it up later." Or, "I'll give when I get a raise." Or, "I'll give when I get a better job." Or, "I'll give when I get out of college and start working."

No! It was assumed that you would give regularly and proportionately, regardless of your job or income or status in life or your feelings about giving! And you were not to delay your giving to the Lord.

So what about us today? Don't delay your giving!